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GUY RIVERS LEAVES HIS HOME.

William F. Millstone
The Herald, October 1862.
GUY RIVERS;

OR,

A BOY'S STRUGGLES IN THE GREAT WORLD.

BY

ALFRED ELWES,

AUTHOR OF

"FRANK AND ANDREA," "PAUL BLAKE," "OCEAN AND HER RULERS,"
"RALPH SEABROOKE," ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY H. ANELAY.

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P R E F A C E .

IF detailed narratives were committed to paper of the early life of many of the citizens of London, from their first youthful entry into the Great World, through the various scenes and trials which they have had to encounter, they would make more entertaining and instructive books for boys than any works that have ever been placed before them.

But such records rarely meet the public eye. The story of a man's early struggles is often unknown beyond the immediate circle of his private friends. Nay ; it as frequently happens that his own family know nothing more of his youthful doings, than that he came up to London, a poor and unfriended lad, and made his way by dint of perseverance or ability.

The meagre outline of the early career of a successful London merchant was related to me by himself, and at his own table, a short time ago. By his

kind permission, I have embodied its chief in the following work, in the hope that the may partly bear out the theory I have pu

Should a perusal of the book do somet than entertain,—should the account of trials, mistakes, efforts, and patient labour contains, serve in the remotest degree to encourage, and to warn, no one will mo rejoice at such a result than the verit Rivers.

3, GLOUCESTER ROAD,
OLD BROMPTON.

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GUY RIVERS;

OR,

A BOY'S STRUGGLES IN THE GREAT WORLD.

CHAPTER I.

THE WEALD OF KENT—BANKS OF THE MEDWAY—
GUY RIVERS—HIS FAMILY AND PROSPECTS.

THE little river Medway, in its course through the county of Kent, visits many a spot of quiet, sylvan beauty. At times, where the widening of the banks enables it to spread out its volume of water, it looks, as viewed through a clump of trees, like a tiny lake, on which a swan or two may swim majestically, with scarce a fear of disturbance. In other places, as it meanders between contiguous hills, bathing their stony feet in gurgling on, it seems as though a sturdy leaper might clear it at a bound; and very beautiful do its waters look, where, on a bright afternoon, the sun pierces through an overhanging willow or white poplar, and specks the tiny waves with dazzling light.

At one of these enticing spots, which a quiet angler so much loves, partly it may be from the delicious quiet they afford, a boy of some fifteen years was seated upon a daisy-spotted bank, which ran into the stream.

The place was a mile or so above the good town of Maidstone,—the square tower of All Saints' Church being visible in the distance—clustered round with houses, and backed by the high hills which are so note-worthy a feature of the neighbourhood.

There was no building in the immediate vicinity. The sun was shining with the vivifying warmth of early summer upon the bright green fields and running water. Myriads of insects, called into life, perchance, but a few hours before, were busy on the earth and in the air, showing, by their enjoyment of their new existence, their gratitude to Heaven. The fish, from the depths of the stream, felt the joyous influence of the season, and playfully threw somersaults into the air, and came down again, with a great splash and splutter, into the water; or, swimming near the surface, wagged their tails merrily, and expressed, in their stupid, wondering way, their delight at the agreeable weather.

A few cows and sheep were peacefully grazing in the field hard by; half-a-dozen crows were attentively examining some curiosity upon the turf, and in the branches of a beech-tree, which was evidently one of the "oldest inhabitants" of the district,

quite a party of young birds held a noisy meeting. With these exceptions, the boy alluded to was quite alone.

He had been reading, for a book was open in his right hand, although that hand was lying listlessly upon the grass. His left palm supported his head, while the elbow rested on the knee; and his eyes were fixed upon the water, where an entire colony of young fry appeared to be taking their first lessons in swimming.

But the fixed look which he gave in that direction, and the whole expression of the face, showed that he saw but little of what was before his eyes. Some inward picture was passing in his brain, which left no room just then for outer objects.

Yet his was not usually the age, nor was his the frame that takes delight in retired scenes and quiet reveries. He was tall and strong beyond his years, and had altogether the appearance of a boy who would not fly from active games and merry sports without some great cause.

He is in a favourable position for his portrait to be taken, and we will sketch it for our readers at once. It will be advisable, also, on this same occasion, to reveal so much of his past life as may be necessary to make his future doings more intelligible. Neither portrait nor explanation will occupy us long.

We are sorry to say that all our skill will not be able to make Guy Rivers—that is his name—a handsome boy. He would not be considered what

is usually termed "good-looking" by one person in a hundred. There are many more, perhaps, who would pronounce him rather plain.

He had a broad, solid forehead; but it was so shaded with sandy hair, that you did not often get a clear view of it. It so overhung his eyes, that at times they almost disappeared, especially when he frowned, and those full eye-brows descended. It was a pity, too, to hide them, for they were decidedly the most pleasant feature in the face; dark grey in colour, bright, piercing, of medium fulness, and shaded with long lashes much darker than his hair.

We have made the most of his forehead and eyes, for we can say little more in favour of his features. The nose was too large; the mouth was too large; the chin was too large; and the complexion was pale to sickliness. Fortunately his teeth were regular and good, and the redness of his lips somewhat relieved the pallor of the face.

The expression of the features, particularly when Guy was thus left to himself, betrayed a degree of thoughtfulness, not to say melancholy, which proved that all was not right within. No happy boy ever could wear such a look; and Guy's companions began to notice that it deepened rather than passed away. They observed, too, that he more and more withdrew himself from their amusements and society. That the cricket-field, where his batting was only second in excellence to his bowling, rarely now

caught a glimpse of his figure. That the noble game of Prisoners' bars, or "base," as they would call it, had lost one of its most adventurous and chivalrous competitors; and that the exciting sport of "rounders" knew him no longer. Whence proceeded this change?

Time was that Guy Rivers' home was a cheerful and a happy one. If tears were shed in it, they were so quickly dried by the sunshine of smiles, as to leave no vestige of their course. The cottage was the same now as ever it had been. Ivy clothed one portion of it, as it had always done. The honeysuckle and sweet-briar, the rose and the carnation, lent it, as in the happy days, the sweetness of their hues and breath. But the spirit within the walls had changed. A malignant genius had stealthily crept in and poisoned the atmosphere, turning what was once peace and pleasantness, to evil and discomfort. And thus it came about:—

The father of Guy was clerk to a solicitor in extensive practice at Maidstone. He had been in the service many years, and for most of them had been esteemed an upright, temperate, and honourable man. His salary was higher than usually falls to the lot of men in his position; and as he was blessed with a frugal and industrious wife, his home presented an appearance, and indeed enjoyed a degree of comfort and refinement, which many more imposing dwellings might have envied.

But within a year or two before this summer

afternoon, the more observant of the neighbours began to notice a change in the little household. Mrs Rivers' face assumed a shadow of care, and she evidently avoided the acquaintances with whom she had been accustomed to interchange civilities. Upon the faces of the elder children—there were five in all, three girls and two boys—often appeared a startled look, very unlike their former cheerful mien; and the master of the house himself, instead of the neat dress and hearty manners which formerly distinguished him, appeared often shabby, sometimes most slovenly, and grew morose and taciturn.

What could it be which had thus transformed the family? What strong influence had been at work to change good into evil, and convert that which was so pleasant and admirable into the very reverse?

The subject was often discussed among those to whom the Rivers were known. The alteration was regretted by some, it was pitied by others, and it was remarked by all. A few thought that embarrassed circumstances—living beyond their means, and getting hopelessly into debt—were the cause; reasons of a different kind were put forward by others; but the majority pursed their lips and nodded their heads, and whispered mysteriously, "*Drink!*" And, alas! the majority were right.

It is not our object to point out how it happened that this frightful vice had obtained possession of Mr Rivers, and had produced the results just noticed on his formerly happy family. As usual, it did not

assail him at once. It stole upon him gradually, and became stronger in its attacks, as his will and sense of propriety and honour weakened in the fight, until, unhappy man, he struggled against it no longer, but gave himself freely up to the degrading enjoyments it could offer.

This was very bad, but it was not the worst. The disposition of the man became changed by this indulgence in his intemperate courses. His temper, it is true, was naturally violent and unforgiving; but in the former days he kept it so firmly under control by the force of reason and judgment, that few could ever charge him with unkindness or injustice. But reason now often fled, and judgment rarely asserted its influence. He spoke harshly to his wife, frightened his daughters from his side, and especially vented his ill-humour on his eldest son, Guy.

The want of money, withdrawn from its proper uses to be expended in drink, began, after a time, to make itself felt in the household. In the old times no portion of it had been spent more cheerfully than upon the schooling of the children. It had been Mr Rivers' pride that they should be well-educated; and he had once pictured, with all a father's feeling, a brilliant future for Guy.

He now grudged every guinea that had to be so employed. Guy was fifteen, he argued, and a big fellow for his age; why was he not working for himself, instead of spunging upon him? He had

quite education enough to earn his bread, and ought so to earn it.

Guy, poor boy, would only have been too willing to do so had he known how to go about it; he would have done so for his mother's sake, to save her a little of the trouble which he saw was weighing upon her for Guy dearly loved his mother. He would have done so, too, on his own account, for he had a proud and independent spirit, and, young as he was, those words of his father, often repeated, stung him to the quick. But when the father, on uttering them was pressed by his son to tell him how to seek the work he was to do, Mr Rivers, with an inconsistency that was becoming habitual with him, took up another tone, and jeeringly inquired, "If he thought *he* could ever earn his salt?" and, "Who would be fool enough to employ an idle vagabond such as *he*?"

Guy bore these taunts with patience, though they nearly drove him wild. For the most part, he did not reply to them, but quitting the house, would ramble in the fields till sometimes late at night brooding over his position, and turning in his mind the stories he had read of youths seeking their fortunes in the world, and often gaining them.

At one time, animated by the recollection of Robinson Crusoe, or Philip Quarll, he thought would go to sea, and trust to some such fortunate accident as befel those famous heroes, to find his home in a far-off island, where his own heart

ingenuity should secure him an independent livelihood. The thought of leaving his mother and his sisters for an indefinite period, perhaps for ever—leaving them, too, with the sad uncertainty whether he was alive or dead—made him reluctantly abandon this notion of the sea.

He was too young to enlist himself as a soldier, even if he had felt an inclination that way; and all hope of his entering his father's profession was now at an end, for whence should come the means to pay the heavy premium required?

Truly the prospect before him was not a bright one. His family had but few relations. The father, it was thought, had none, and the one or two possessed by the mother were not in a position to lend assistance. No wonder Guy's face should be thoughtful, and that care should, even at his age, begin to set its seal upon his brow. The subject was one he could not but muse upon, for it was daily thrust before him, and on each occasion presented itself more painfully to his mind. Something, he felt, must be done, and that shortly, for matters could not continue upon the footing they now were; but what, but how, he knew not.

In these and similar reflections all that afternoon had passed. It was a half-holiday at his school, for he still went to school, although the father had decided that the present quarter should be the last. After eating a scanty dinner, he had wandered, book in hand, away from home to the fields beside the

river, and he had sat in the spot where we have described him, for many hours uninterrupted. He had attempted to read, but his thoughts would travel from the page and the imaginary troubles of the hero of the tale, to his own real and present ones.

Yet somehow his meditations were not all of a painful kind. The buoyancy of youth would mingle with his musings, and occasionally exhibit to his fancy a bright and hopeful picture—a picture of some fancied toil being crowned with extraordinary success, and he, with exultation of spirit, presenting himself to his mother, and receiving from her the joyous welcome of a parent to a son graced alike by fortune and by fame.

It was hard to tear himself from such imaginings. But the stern reality always would step in, and cast a gloom even upon the sunshine and the summer day.

But the sunshine itself was now gone, and day was yielding up the earth to obscurity. He must return, for he was a couple of miles away from home; and however loath he might be again to meet the hard words which now so constantly assailed him, he felt that he required food, and knew that he must have shelter. So, with a heavy heart, he rose up from the grass, and directed his unwilling steps homewards.

CHAPTER II.

THE RETURN HOME—GUY'S RECEPTION—SOLITARY
MUSINGS—HIS FINAL RESOLVE.

ALTHOUGH the distance Guy had to traverse was nearly two miles, his mind remained still so constantly fixed upon what had better be done to improve his condition and obtain an independent livelihood, that he reached the bottom of the lane, conducting to his home, without being even aware of the ground he had passed over. Then, indeed, he saw that he had got back, and that it was nearly night.

Arming himself with courage to meet his father, —Oh! how different to the time when he looked forward to such meeting with delight!—he began ascending the steep path which led up to the house in that direction.

Just as he reached the wicket-gate, set in a holly hedge, that gave entrance to the kitchen garden of the house, his ear was attracted by the sound of suppressed sobs, on the inner side of the grounds.

He hastily raised the latch and passed through, when he perceived a figure, huddled up together, close against the hedge.

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"What's that? Who's there?" inquired Guy.

The figure at once rose, and perceiving, in spite of the waning day-light, who it was that questioned, hastily came forward, and, seizing the lad's hand, exclaimed, in a broken voice,

"Oh, Guy, I'm so glad you've come home: I am so glad;" and then burst into tears.

"What is it? What's the matter?" asked Guy, in a gentle tone, as he recognised his young brother Willy. "Is there anything fresh?"

"No; nothing;—only father's come home;—and he's so cross;—and mother's been crying;—and he hit me with his walking-stick on the arm:—such a bruise!—and so frightened me, that I ran out, and I haven't dared go in again."

It was the old story,—at least it was an old story now, and Guy, as he stood there, and listened to his brother's broken account, and heard that their mother had been in tears,—doubtless on account of some harsh and cruel words,—he felt his heart to be bursting.

Some great resolution must have been forming in his mind during the minute or two that he was silent;—a resolution which communicated itself to his voice with sufficient clearness to excite the attention of the child; for when Guy said, in a calm tone, while he took his brother's hand, "We will go in, Willy;" the boy, notwithstanding his fear, offered no opposition, but quietly walked beside him.

Traversing the little kitchen-garden, and a lawn

that lay between it and the house, they arrived at the back door, and were then close to the room which the family usually occupied.

The shutters were closed, but light streamed through two stars cut in the upper panels; and, from certain angry sounds which were heard within, it was easy to guess that all there was not perfectly quiet and harmonious.

Guy rapped at the door loudly enough to put a momentary stop to the discussion. It was opened by one of the girls, who whispered in Guy's ear, that "papa was worse than ever;" but the announcement did not prevent the lad from entering the room. By some strange feeling, it seemed, indeed, to have quite a contrary effect, for, without a moment's hesitation, he turned the handle of the parlour door and walked in.

Mr Rivers sat immediately opposite the entrance, with a clay-pipe in his right hand, and a glass of liquor on the table beside him. One glance was sufficient to prove that he had already been indulging in drink; for his hair was in the greatest disorder, his cravat awry, his linen creased, crumpled and soiled, and his eyes half closed in his worn and bloated face.

At the opposite side of the table were his wife, and eldest daughter, a girl of sixteen. Both were engaged at needlework, and both looked as if they had been weeping: the mother's eyelids especially, were flushed and swollen. A second girl, a year younger

than Guy, was at an equal distance between her father and mother. She was also seated at the table, and was evidently preparing some school tasks, for her slate, and a little heap of books, were before her.

As Guy entered, followed by the sister, who had let him in, and little Willy, the father's eyes suddenly lit up with an expression of anger, as though the sight of his eldest son was something which irritated him, and he at once accosted the lad in an imperious tone, with an inquiry as to where he had been skulking all day?

"I was at school, father," Guy answered quietly, "till twelve o'clock; and since dinner, as it was a half-holiday, I have been out for a walk."

"Holiday! Walk! Of course. That's just what every idle vagabond likes. All holiday for you; anything but work!"

Seeing that Guy made no answer, but sat down beside his mother, Mr Rivers continued, his tone and manner getting more irritated as he went on:

"And how much longer, you young scamp, do you mean to go on at this holiday-making? Do you never mean to do any good for yourself? Are you to hang always upon me, you idle dog you, and live like a gentlemen while I do the slaving? But I won't do it any longer;—that I won't. I won't go on wearing out my life for a parcel of idle young wretches not worth their salt. If you want bread you must work for it. I've had to work for it; my

father had to work for it, and my children shall work for it, or they may starve. They shan't eat any more bread of mine. That they shan't."

Guy had been more than once on the point of reply during this not unusual tirade, but an imploring look from his mother had restrained him.

When Mr Rivers paused to relight his pipe, which had gone out while he was talking, Guy said, with a forced calmness of tone :

"Once for all, father, let me tell you that I want to work just as much as you wish me to do. But I've thought and thought, and can't tell how I'm to go about it. Show me the way and I'll do my best."

"Do your best, you young vagabond!" exclaimed Mr Rivers, in an insulting tone, and who was evidently too far advanced in intoxication to reason upon what he heard: "Do your best? And what is the best that an idle scamp like you can do? Who'd employ you? What would your services be worth? Could you get your bread unless you begged for it or stole it?"

"Father," said Guy, starting up to his feet and confronting his parent, as he sat moving himself in an irritated manner in his chair; "I *have* done my best to please you and to be a good and dutiful son. I *have* not been able to do more. I wish to do more; but I cannot bear any longer these cruel words. I see you grudge me the bread I eat, and the clothes I wear, and the lodging you give me; but what am I to do?"

"Go and work!" thundered Mr Rivers with an oath, as he dashed his pipe with violence upon his glass, which was shivered all to pieces, while the liquor spirted over the table.

The eldest girl uttered a scream of fear, while the two youngest children hurriedly escaped from the room.

Mrs Rivers rose in alarm; for there was a mingled look of such defiance, and yet despair, in Guy's face, that it excited her beyond endurance.

But Guy bowed his head, pressed his mother's hand, and, without another word, slowly left the room, and closed the door behind him.

He kissed his little brother and sister who were waiting just outside, and, still without a word, stole quietly up stairs.

He reached his own room. Fortunately for his then feelings, he had one to himself. He turned the handle, but before entering the chamber he heard the parlour door open below, as hastily close, and his mother's voice eagerly inquire, "Where is Guy?"

She seemed satisfied with the answer, that he had gone up stairs, for no one followed him. He passed into the room; shut the door, with that strange calmness that had distinguished him all along, and stood for an instant in the middle of the apartment like one who was bewildered; but as the whole scene came flashing in detail upon his memory,—as the words and looks were again brought vividly before him,—a sound issued from his throat as

though he were choking; and, sinking upon his knees beside his low, pallet bed, he buried his face in the coverlet, and gave way to a perfect storm of sobs and tears!

Oh! if we could but in our later years relieve the overburthened heart by such a means, how much of the keen edge of grief would there not be blunted! Happy they who are yet so new to the world that they can find in weeping an outlet for sorrow; for among the other penalties forced upon us by advancing age, it is not one of the least that tears are denied us. In childhood and in youth, they are our resource and balm; soothing us in pain, softening us in sadness. But as Time marks his progress on our brow, and stiffens the sinews of our frame, the sources of our tears seal up, or the tears escape at only rare intervals to our eyes.

It is hard to say how long Guy remained in the position which he had adopted at the first outpouring of his grief. He had ceased to weep, and had sought consolation and firmness where both could best be found,—in supplication to God. He had repeated, in whispered words, every prayer that had been taught him in childhood and in later years; and when they were done, the fulness of his heart supplied him with others fitted to his particular position. He felt calmer and happier after they were uttered; and when he rose from his knees, a new spirit seemed to have entered into him, as though he had grown older in a few hours of time.

It was now nearly dark, for it was night, and the moon had not yet risen. His window remained open, and a delicious coolness came floating through the chamber.

He drew a chair to the lattice, and leaning his elbows on the sill, rested his head within his hands, and allowed the fresh air to play upon his fevered cheeks.

One resolution he had now taken, whatever might be the result. It was the last night he would sleep in that room and under that roof. His father had told him in so many words that he wished him gone; that he would not willingly grant him another crust, or extend to him any further shelter. That was enough. He would leave home with the morning light, and become a wanderer. He was determined to go, if he dropped by the way, or starved upon the road-side. But he trusted, with God's help, that his own stout heart and willing hand would prevent such a calamity.

And then, as he gazed out into the darkness, he reflected upon the plan he should pursue when sunrise enabled him to leave his home.

He could not seek work in Maidstone. That was impossible. He felt his courage fail him at the idea of applying to any one in the town where his family and himself were known, and where so many questions would be asked and must be answered. Besides, he had a proud spirit, and, in spite of everything, he loved his father, and could not bear

the thought of either people's pity for himself, or their remarks at the vice and unkindness which had driven him away from home.

No! he would travel far. He would go to LONDON,—to the great city of which he had heard and read so much,—the place to which thousands before him, who wished to make their way in the world, had already gone; and where, as he had been often told, employment could be found for all who were sober and industrious, and who were not wanting in common ability.

And this last particular, as it came across his mind, made him reflect upon what he could himself do.

At school he had been esteemed neither a very clever boy nor the reverse. He wrote a tolerable hand; he was a fair arithmetician; he had made the usual progress in grammar and geography; and, from being always fond of reading, and having a good memory, he had stored his mind with many facts of history and much general information.

He regretted now that he had not applied himself more closely; for he feared, when his little stock of knowledge had to be used to gain his bread, it would be found but a scanty and inefficient one. Still of one thing he felt assured,—and at the present time, when the hour of trial was approaching, the conviction only came upon him the stronger,—that he had a will to do and a mind to learn, when opportunity should be found for both to be exerted.

And how stood his means for reaching the great city, to which he had determined to direct his steps?

To tell the truth, they were not extensive. There was no necessity to go to yonder drawer and empty the contents of the earthenware money-box to learn the exact sum. He knew it to a farthing. The last piece of coin he had put into it made the total eight shillings and sixpence; a small amount with which to begin the world. "No matter," he thought; "I would carry out my intention with a bare shilling in my pocket."

Having come to this settled resolution, he turned from the window with the idea of seeking rest; for although he was half famished with hunger, having eaten nothing since a very early dinner, he would not think, in his then temper of mind, of going below to get a morsel of bread.

A light step coming up the staircase made him turn to listen. Some one must be approaching his room, for there was no other chamber but his own in that direction, the other sleeping apartments being reached by another flight of stairs.

His heart beat quickly as the sounds came nearer, and he sat down again in the chair to await his visitor. There was a tap at the door, but ere he could utter the words "Come in," the handle was turned, and his mother bearing a candle and small tray in her hand, entered the room.

CHAPTER III.

THE INTERVIEW—MOTHER AND SON—FUTURE PROSPECTS —THE LETTER.

GUY thought he had exhausted all his tears, but when he gazed into his mother's face, as she put down the tray, and observed the look of grief and compassion which it wore, his eyes again became obscured while his tongue refused to speak.

But his action was more eloquent than words, and served to show the natural tenderness of his nature, and the love he bore his mother; for he threw his arms round her with convulsive eagerness, and buried his face in her bosom.

For a few minutes neither spoke. At length she kissed his broad, white forehead repeatedly, and said: "Come, come, Guy, my dear boy, do not take on so. It will make you ill, and that will not mend matters. You have had no tea. I have brought you some. Your father is in bed and asleep. So are the girls; and I can stay with you till you have done."

"Thank you, thank you, dear mother," answered Guy. "It is just like you to be so thoughtful. I am so glad, too, you have come, for I wanted to see

you very, very much, and couldn't bear the thought of——"

He was on the point of saying—"leaving home without bidding you good-bye;" but he stopped short, for he had not yet reflected how his mother would accept such a notion.

But his mother's anxiety and clear perception finished the phrase without his uttering it, and if he had even said the words, they could not have been more intelligible to her.

She held him from her and looked into his face. He at first avoided her searching gaze; but at length he raised his eyes to hers, while she peered into them as if they had been a volume of intense interest. And so they were to her.

She heaved a deep sigh, and then said in a faltering voice—

"You mean to leave us, Guy?"

He saw that further concealment of his purpose was useless, so he avowed his object at once.

"Yes, mother, I must go. I can bear this treatment no longer. Perhaps you will be happier when I am gone."

"I happier, Guy?"

"Yes, mother, happier. My father will, perhaps, not be so—irritable—when I am away. He will have one less to provide for. The sight of me, too, seems to make him worse. He may be gentler when I am gone."

"But, my poor boy, you talk of going—of leaving

home—where will you go? Has any one promised you work?—a situation?”

Guy shook his head; but the tone in which he made his answer was not despondent—

“No, mother; no one. I have thought of this scores and scores of times, but I have not spoken about it to a soul. But I am now resolved. I am strong, and willing to work. I do not know much it's true; but I'm not a fool, and I can learn. And I have made up my mind that, with daylight to-morrow, I will set out for London, where I have heard that all who are willing can find something to do.”

“But, dear Guy,” argued the mother, “it would be madness to set out on such an errand—without means, without friends, without introductions. How could you even get there? And when there, how could you live until you obtained work which would provide you food and shelter?”

“I have thought of it all, dear mother,” answered Guy, in a tone which at once persuaded and gratified his hearer—“I have prayed for strength and direction, and I think my prayer has been heard, for my resolution to set out and seek my fortune is stronger than before. Of one thing you may be certain, that *here* I cannot, and *will not*, remain a day longer. Do not then, dear, dear mother, think to oppose my going. We shall only be the more unhappy—both of us—if you do so; for I must refuse to obey you in this; and I shall be miserable because I refuse to do what you ask me; and you will be unhappy

because of my disobedience. No, dear mother strengthen me in my resolutions—make my courage greater than it is—and I will do my best to make you yet proud and happy in your son.”

The mother gazed upon her boy with pride, already flashing through her tears.

Never before had she beheld him thus: never till this night had she heard words flow so freely and persuasively from his lips; for Guy was naturally a reserved boy, and of late he had been more than usually silent.

She folded him in her arms again and again; and at length looking into his eyes with an expression of solemnity, she whispered—

“Let us pray, Guy.”

They knelt down side by side at the foot of the bed, when the mother, drooping her forehead upon her clasped hands, poured out her feelings to One who could best understand their intensity, and whose Holy Spirit could alone breathe consolation to her afflicted heart.

And that consolation was vouchsafed; for, as she rose from her position of humility, an expression of calmness and resignation was upon her features, such as Guy had rarely beheld them exhibit.

She then removed the little mirror from the tiny dressing-table placed before the window, put the tea-tray upon it, and as she snuffed the candle, which had been growing quite a cauliflower wick in the interim, exclaimed, almost cheerfully—

"Come, Guy, dear, have your tea,—I am afraid it will be quite cold,—and let us talk this matter over."

Guy did not wait for further pressing. He was indeed terribly hungry, and could have eaten double the amount of bread and butter his mother had brought him up, although it was not a very small allowance either.

While the meal was being despatched, Mrs Rivers drew from her son the project he had formed for his future proceedings.

It may be conjectured she was not long in doing that, for Guy's project was limited to quitting home and getting to London; but he could not, of course, in his ignorance form a plan of anything he should do when he arrived there. He trusted to Providence to aid him in his search for work; and as there seemed nothing else to be done, and Mrs Rivers' experience was not much greater than her boy's, there was no help for it, and they left it so. Happily, they had both a simple faith in the Divine goodness, which relieved them of much anxiety they would otherwise have felt upon this head.

On the score of wardrobe, she selected him the things which she considered best adapted for the journey he was about to undertake, and enjoined him, directly he was any way settled, to let her know by letter where his box, with the remainder of his clothes, could be sent; and she promised to begin the very next day packing and arranging it.

Lastly came the question of money. Small as his

store was, she could add to it but a few shilling for the altered circumstances of the family left her at times very much straitened in means.

But Guy did not think it small; not he! He often had he not dined upon a penny roll with three halfpenny sausage, and a mug of water to wash it down! How often of late had he not gone without his dinner altogether! And was he going to be extravagant now, when so much depended upon his economy? Did he mean to be less resolute, less self-denying, now that he was on the point of launching into the world, an independent being? Surely not.

The mother could scarcely, even in the midst of her anxiety, withhold an occasional smile at the spirit and enthusiasm of her boy; but strange to say, that anxiety diminished the longer she heard him talk and watched the expression of his face. He seemed to have grown so much older within the last few hours,—from the time, indeed, of his entering the house that evening,—that she more than once found herself talking to him in a strain which would better, she thought, have become a youth of twenty than one who had barely passed his fifteenth year. And yet there was nothing in his replies which could argue that she had over-estimated his intelligence. On the contrary, he penetrated her meaning before it was half expressed, and so persuaded her, by his entire manner, that few lads could be better trusted to meet the dangers and temptations

of the great world, that she could not but think he had chosen the wiser course in thus cutting a difficulty which threatened never to be undone.

The bell of the distant old church clock boomed out the hour of midnight before Mrs Rivers rose to quit her son. She would not have left him then,—nay, she would have stayed with him all night, but that she knew he intended to be stirring before six, and would require rest ere entering upon so wearisome a journey.

Half an hour more was spent in final words and admonitions.

Guy was charged to write before a week was over, to tell her how he fared. And he on his part gave his mother a thousand tender messages for his sisters, whom he should not now be able to embrace before he left, although he had kissed the youngest, as well as his brother, before he came up stairs.

“And your father, Guy?” inquired Mrs Rivers, falteringly.

Guy looked her fully in the face till both eyes swam in tears. At length he said :

“I cannot see him, mother. But tell him, when I am gone, that I always loved him, and would have done all I could to please him. He will hear through you, for of course I shall write often to you, how I am getting on. But perhaps it will be better that you should give him no message; he may not like it. I will leave a few words for him here, upon my table. I shall always pray God to

bless him, and I hope he will one day find out that I am not so worthless,—not such an idle vagabond as he chooses to call me.”

“Oh, Guy!”

“Dear mother, those were his words; but I will prove to him that they are false,—that they are not rightfully given to me. You are going. Once more!”

Their hearts beat together for a few seconds, when the poor mother, tearing herself away,—without venturing to cast another look at her son,—hurriedly left the room, and crept stealthily down stairs.

It was a good half hour still before Guy got into bed.

As the door closed upon the being he loved best in the world, he turned again to the window, and opening it wide, looked out upon the country.

The moon had cleared the topmost trees, and nearly at the full, was shining with intense brilliancy from a clear and balmy sky.

While gazing into its depths, and inhaling the beauty which this “wondrous lamp” imparted to the landscape, Guy could not but be conscious of the great change which had come over his feelings since the interview with his mother. It might be that the hearty meal of which he had just partaken counted for something in his altered sensations. Whatever the cause, a spirit of cheerfulness, not to say of exultation, now coloured all his views,

and one would have thought that the morning light was to rouse him to set out on a party of pleasure, long desired and provided for, rather than to undertake a journey whose end and success no one could venture to predict.

Closing the window at length, with reluctance, he tore a leaf from a half-finished exercise book, and indited the following letter to his father :—

“DEAR FATHER,—You told me last night to ‘go and work.’ I have resolved to obey you, and I hope to find that somebody will employ my willing hands. I do not ask you to forgive me for going away from home without asking your leave, because you appeared to wish me to do so, and therefore cannot be angry with me for that. You seem to think I have eaten your bread long enough. I am now going to try and earn it for myself; and I hope if I do, that you will give me back that love which you have lately taken from me; and you do not know how unhappy that thought has made me. Be kind, dear father, to my ever beloved mother, and my sisters and brother. I shall pray God to make you all happy; and I set out with the intention to do my best, and seek my fortune by honest work. If you are ever so inclined, do not send after me or follow me, for I am determined never to come back to be idle again upon your hands. I am not going to sea; but I mean to travel to London, and try whether I can’t earn my own living and a bed to lie upon at

night. So good bye, dear father, and may God bless you all !

“GUY RIVERS.”

Having folded this little note and directed it to his father, he quickly undressed, and was soon sleeping as peacefully on his little pillow as though care and trouble had never yet pressed upon his eye-lids.

Nature was kinder to him in his dreams than in his waking hours, for the sweet and happy smile that occasionally swept over his face as he thus lay motionless in slumber, told of the pleasant pictures in which his fancy was revelling.

CHAPTER IV.

THE NEXT MORNING—THE COTTAGE BY DAY-BREAK—
SISTER SOPHY—ANOTHER PARTING.

IT so often happens with man and boykind, that the dawn of another day imparts a new colour to their ideas and a different tone to their reflections, that Guy Rivers would not have been the first by many thousands if, on awakening next morning, he had completely changed his mind and resolved to stay where he was, rather than seek unknown troubles.

The hushed calm of evening is so favourable to the play of fancy—the semi-obscurity which veils surrounding objects, so conceals their asperities and makes the roughest path seem smooth, that most people are inclined, beneath their united influence, to form the boldest projects and conceive the most difficult tasks. But with the broad light of morning vanish half these grand resolves, and they even wonder, as they reflect upon them in the sunshine, how they could under any circumstances have ever given them serious entertainment.

If Guy's determination remained unaltered as he sprang from his bed at day break, there were two great reasons for his fixedness of purpose.

One was a certain firmness, not to say obstinacy of disposition imparted to him by nature, that made him very unwilling to forego any idea that he had once conceived. The other was the having come to his resolution by such slow degrees, that it had grown out of events like a fruit advancing to maturity; and its fulfilment could no more now be cast back or delayed than it would have been possible to make the ripe fruit return once again to its green and imperfect state.

He therefore hurried on his clothes with no faltering purpose. He laced his boots with no trembling hand. He examined his little fortune, and put it back into the silk purse which his sister Mary—the sister who came next himself in age—had worked for him on his last birth-day. He secured it carefully in his pocket, having taken out a shilling for the day's expenses, and gathered into a handkerchief the few extra articles of clothing which his mother had advised his taking with him. And having done all this, and given a last glance at the room he was leaving, perhaps for ever, he gently opened his door, and, with his bundle in his hand, crept softly down the stairs.

His mother had told him she would put upon the table of the living-room, a loaf of bread and some butter, so that he might not leave the house without a little support wherewith to commence his journey; and true enough, the food was there, ready to his hand.

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Close beside the tray was his mother's prayer-book. It was evidently so placed that it should attract his attention. He opened it, when he perceived upon the fly-leaf beneath his mother's name, —written some years before in Mr Rivers' hand, when things were at their happiest,—these words in pencil, "For my darling boy, with his mother's love and blessing."

He was touched by this fresh proof of her affection, and, as he pressed the book to his lips, would have given much to be able to bestow on its donor one more kiss before quitting home. "Perhaps, however," he thought, while a sigh escaped him, "it would only make my going still more difficult!"

This idea made him quicken his departure. Having secured his present, he cut off from the loaf two tremendous slices of bread and butter, which he laid together like a sandwich, and, putting them into his pocket, walked on tiptoe towards a small back door which led from the kitchen into the garden, being afraid that the drawing the bolts and the noise of the key in the lock of the principal door might arouse the family.

He was surprised on reaching the kitchen to find the door only on the latch; but supposing that it had been so left by accident over night, he stepped out and quickly closed it behind him.

He walked straight down the path leading to the gate by which he had entered the garden the night before, without turning his head to the right or to

the left, although his ears were ever on the alert in the expectation of hearing himself called angrily by his father's voice. But no sounds, those of numerous early birds, saluted him, was evident that the family were not yet astir.

He turned round at a point of the pathwa the gate, where he knew a full prospect of th tage was to be obtained, and stopped a few m to examine each casement in turn.

There stood the little house in all its quiet t as if it, too, were sleeping, and would still while longer ere rousing itself for the day. I —the windows,—were as yet fast closed, wi blinds, like eyelids, firmly shut. Its mouth, door—over the porch of which the rose and l suckle clambered in rivalry of each other likewise closed, and gave at present, no s awakening life.

As Guy's looks wandered from window to w he figured to himself the beings whom he su to be lying within the rooms they lighted.

That large one in the centre was his p chamber. His father was doubtless sleeping h as he was apt to do after these nights of dri But Guy could not believe but that his moth lying there awake thinking of him,—and p listening for his footsteps as he stole away home.

The little lattice on the right was Willy's r slip, connected with the principal chamber



that other on the left, gave light to the apartment occupied by Mary and Kate, the younger sisters.

His own window and that of his eldest sister, Sophy, were on the other side of the cottage, and although he wished to give a last peep at both, he feared to make a longer delay by going out of his road to look at them.

"It cannot, however, take me a moment," he argued, and was on the point of walking round, when a step behind roused him with a start from his reverie.

He turned hastily to see who it was that could be thus early astir, and his surprise was great indeed to observe his sister Sophy, dressed, with hat complete, as though prepared for walking.

He thought at first she had got up thus betimes with the mere intention of taking a little turn, to enjoy the soft, fresh air before her breakfast; and Guy had already in his mind invented an excuse for his own early rising, so as to disguise his project from his sister, for fear she might in some way endeavour to oppose it.

But the first look at her face told him he had nothing to conceal from her. Her eyes were red as if from weeping or want of sleep; and as she kissed him, she pressed his hand with a convulsive grasp, as if striving to control her feelings.

"I know all, dear Guy," she said—"I know all. Dear mother came into my room last night, after she left you, and told me everything. And so, I

got up very early,—I have been up and this hour—determined to see you before you and to bid you good bye. I will walk with you part of the way,—you will let me walk with dear Guy, won't you?—and we can talk as along.”

Guy made no answer, for his heart was torn but he drew his sister's hand through his arm holding it in his, they passed out of the gate into the little lane together.

They walked down the steep path which the high road, without exchanging a word atmosphere in the immediate neighbourhood home seemed to have the effect of compelling to silence; but directly they had cleared were fairly on the highway, Sophy spoke :

“It seems very hard, dear Guy, to think when we might be all so happy together, you be forced to go away and leave us; now, it?”

“True enough, Sophy, it does seem hard. I suppose there's no help for it. I have done to make things comfortable; but, somehow, I seem to have done it wrong; at all events, what I have done hasn't succeeded, and I can bear the longer. And yet, dear,” he added, while he tried to give greater force to what he said, “I could do it, and I would, if I thought, by stopping, that my mother would be happier; but as I see no help of that, why, the sooner I'm gone the better.

"For you, perhaps, Guy," said the girl, in a tone of despondency.

"Oh, not for me only, Sophy. Haven't you noticed that the angriest looks and hardest words come out when I am there. He may be pretty quiet as long as I am away; but, directly I show my face, then the worst begins. Oh, yes, it's much better that I should be gone."

"And I, for one, dear Guy, will never say stop, thinking, as I do, that it will be for your good to go. I didn't mean, by what I said just now, that I envied your being more comfortable; I love you too well for that; but I was thinking how dear mother, how Mary and Kate and Willy, and all of us, will feel in the evenings when one of the familiar faces will be missed—a great gap in the circle, and no one to fill it up—an empty chair, and no one to use it."

Sophy here quite broke down. Guy pressed her hand gently, and they again walked on for a time in silence.

She again spoke, after having used a great effort to calm herself:

"I didn't intend, dear Guy, when I waited for you this morning, to make your parting sadder than was necessary. You have a long and difficult journey before you, and you cannot tell what hardships await you at the end of it. I daresay you have thought them over before you took this step; but, whatever you fancied them, they have not been terrible enough to frighten you or turn you back. You

are right. I am sure, if I had been a boy, I should do what you have done. I mean to try not to be sorry that you are gone, because I am sure you will be happier in struggling against the world, independent, than in remaining at home as things now are. As you are a boy, then, your path is before you—in striving against the world. My duty, as a girl, is to fight *my* battle—in the quiet of home. Our mother needs assistance, and I will give her what little help I can ; but Guy, let us resolve, as we are about to go our different ways, always to think of one another kindly and fondly, as brother and sister should. Although we are parted, it is no reason for loving one another less tenderly. I know this will be more difficult for you than for me. You will know others, many others, who may supply our place, even more successfully than we have been able to do. You will have so many things to see, and so many things to do, and so many things to distract your attention, that our figures will run the risk of being jostled out of your memory. Not so with us. As we sit down, day after day, in the same place, doing the same things, and talking on the same subjects, there is little chance of our forgetting you. What you may be doing, or where you may happen to be staying at such and such a time, will be often and often the subject of our chat ; and you may be sure, dear Guy, we shall ever remember you in our prayers.”

“ You don’t know me yet, Sophy,” answered Guy,

softly, "if you think I shall ever cease to remember home and those I leave behind me. Oh, no, no, no! I have had too much kindness, too much love, ever to forget those who have shown them to me. It shall not be my fault, Sophy, dear, if my affection for you ever weakens. I will write to you on all occasions; and you shall judge, by the tone of my letters, whether I am growing forgetful."

"Be it so, dear Guy; and here, I am afraid, we must part. I must get back to prepare breakfast for father. Here is my umbrella, Guy, you know, that was given me last birthday. Accept it as a little remembrance of me; it is all I have. It isn't much, but it will serve you as a walking-stick in dry weather and a covering in the rain. And now, dear Guy, God bless you and make you happy."

They kissed each other again and again. The girl then resolutely turned her steps homewards, only once stopping at a rising ground to wave her handkerchief to Guy as he stood rooted on the spot where they had taken leave.

A moment after, and they saw each other no more.


CHAPTER V.

THE STAGE-COACH—BLUE BELL HILL—KIT'S COY
HOUSE—A BEAUTIFUL PROSPECT.

JOE would have been more unnerved at parting with his sister Sophy if it had taken place close to the town of Maidstone which he was about to traverse; but as, on leaving her, he came at once into the paved streets, found himself amongst the awakening bustle of the place, he controlled his emotions, and walked dily on.

On reaching the High Street, nearly opposite Town Hall, he could not help stopping for a few moments to watch the process of loading a stage-coach, which stood beside a large inn surrounded by passengers and idlers, while a little heap of parcels on the ground was gradually diminishing, as they were stowed away in some mysterious receptacle in the interior of the vehicle.

He had often before stood in the same place, followed the proceedings with much pleasure, never with the amount of interest that he felt this morning; for he knew, from sundry intimations printed on the panels of the coach, that before long it would stand with its load of goods and passengers.



where he just now most longed to be, viz., in the "Borough" at London, and would set down some of the travellers at the famous "Charing Cross"—a locality of which, in his ignorance, he formed the most extraordinary notions.

"It's no great importance, however," he muttered to himself, as he turned away to continue his journey, "whether I arrive a day sooner or a day later. There's no hurry, for the matter of that, and I haven't a penny to spend in coach-hire, letting alone the fact that they'd charge me all I have in the world only to take me the journey. How rich some of those people must be, to be able to travel about where they like, and yet have plenty of money to spend afterwards. Ah, well; who knows? Perhaps I may be able to do it myself some day, though I don't see much chance of it just now."

He had by this time cleared the houses, and got upon the high-road which led to Rochester.

This route had been selected in preference to the direct London road, on account of a wish expressed by Guy's mother, that he should pass through Gravesend on his way, to visit a brother of hers who was established in the latter town.

Although Mrs Rivers had not heard from her brother for the last two years, she had reason to believe that he was in tolerable circumstances; and in a few lines which she had intrusted to Guy, hurriedly written in pencil, she had recommended him warmly to his uncle's protection.

She felt also a little more easy by inducing him to take this road, although much the longer one, because he knew the ground to Rochester very well, having walked the distance with some schoolfellows on more than one occasion. Besides, having once got over that part of the journey and the other stage to Gravesend, his uncle might perhaps, she thought, invite him to remain with his family for a few days, until he could put him in the way to do something for himself in that town. And, at all events, if he did not do that, he would perchance assist his nephew on his journey to London, and give him advice as to how he should act when he arrived in the great city.

As Guy had formed no settled resolution of his own about the road he should take, he readily yielded to his mother's wishes; and before eight o'clock, was far enough upon his way to have begun the ascent of Blue Bell Hill, so celebrated in that part of the country for the magnificent view which it commands.

By that time he was getting both hungry and thirsty. The road was dusty and the sun hot, so he bethought him of a cool place where he could take his breakfast,—for he had not yet touched the bread and butter which he had provided for that repast.

He debated with himself whether he should go up to the inn and ask for a drink of water with which to wash down his frugal meal. But besides, that he hesitated with his present feelings to expose himself to questions on the open bench of a public-house,

he observed, as he glanced at it along the road, that the sun's rays were pouring on the place with the utmost ardour, and gave promise of very little comfortable rest.

"By the bye," he exclaimed, as an idea struck him, "there's that funny Kit's Coty-house, which can't be far from here. I remember, when some of us went to see it last summer, we enjoyed the shade famously. That will be a capital place for breakfast."

Looking warily about as he neared the summit of the hill, he soon perceived a narrow footway, which led, in an irregular line, downwards towards the valley from the edge of the bank, where the steps of the curious had worn away the grass in their journeyings to and from the place he spoke of.

Following the indication of a path thus made, he crossed a style set in a hawthorn hedge, and soon had before him the strange monument which has from time immemorial borne the name of Kit's Coty-house.

Supposed by many to be a Druidic altar, by others a tomb raised to perpetuate the memory of some barbaric chieftain, it stands, as it has stood for centuries, overlooking one of the richest tracts of country in all England, itself an object of curiosity, wonder, and superstition.

In shape it is not unlike a card-house made by a child, being composed of three upright stones, with another at the top, the weight of which would alone

keep the others in their place, even if they were not sunk deeply into the ground. Deeply as they are set, they are still so lofty, that a tall man with his hat on, can pass beneath the simple roof without stooping his head.

Not a soul was near the spot, or indeed was visible, when Guy came before this singular fabric. At the lower part of the field a flock of sheep and some cows were grazing, and two old cart-horses, almost past their work, were standing in that patient attitude those laborious animals are often apt to assume, the head of one resting on the back of the other, while their scanty tails whisked away the busy flies.

Satisfied with the quiet of the spot, the lad selected the softest bit of turf he could discover in the shade, and seating himself upon it, drew out his bread and butter, and began munching it with the sense of enjoyment which youth, health, a good appetite, and a long walk, are apt to engender.

As he did so, he feasted his eyes on the magnificent prospect before him, and thus brought to the pleasure with which he devoured his meal the gratification of another and intellectual sense.

It was not that he had been unobservant of the view, which the rising ground of the hill had, bit by bit, presented to him in toiling up the road. But besides that he had his thoughts fixed upon where he should take his meal, as he came up the steep ascent, he had reserved the prospect as a kind of

treat, to be partaken of in full when he could enjoy it uninterruptedly.

And truly, there could be few persons, having any powers of admiration within them, that could fail to enjoy most keenly the splendid panorama presented to the eyes from that elevated spot.

The Weald of Kent lay for many miles at Guy's feet, and the course of the Medway could be traced, in one spot by its silvery surface, at another, by the rows of trees which stood along its banks, and again by the brown sail of one of the picturesque barges, where it made its apparently mysterious way through the green slopes of meadow ground.

The pretty village of Aylesford, with its gabled roofs and quaint bridge, and the ruins of Allington Castle, just peering through the dense foliage, were a little to the right, somewhat dimmed in clearness by the distance at which they were viewed. And the spires of various churches, which rose from a framework of variegated red and green, at certain intervals of distance, hinted at the existence of other villages and hamlets, scattered in prolific measure over the extensive district.

The whole scene, with the beautiful clumps of trees, planted, as it were, in the most favourable positions to produce effect, and the richness of the meadow-land, spread out in places for many acres without the intersection of a hedge, wore so much the appearance of a gigantic park, that Guy caught himself looking, as he had done on a former oc-

casion, for some huge palace or colossal seat to which the grounds before him were the natural appendage. "But what a house," he thought, "it ought to be!"

Beautiful as this landscape always appears, it is never so lovely as on a day similar to the one when Guy viewed it.

The warmth of the sun, as it rose higher in the heavens, had called up many of those white summer clouds, whose presence but makes the blue sky sweeter and more intense. As, driven by a light breeze, they chased each other across the upper air, they threw shifting shadows on the earth, which lent the different features of the prospect an indescribable charm. At one moment, an observant eye might watch them stealing, by slow degrees, over the distant hills, and travelling down into the valley, which they then crossed with giant speed, tinting field after field of a sombre hue, then lifting like a veil, and making the bright green brighter from the contrast. At another, a fantastic cloud, shaped like a ring, would travel on, so as to allow one brilliant mass of rays to peep through, and illuminate a circular patch of country in moving. Here, a square mass of vapour would draw a regular line of shadow over miles and miles of country, dividing field from field as though the sun were bent upon a geometric survey; and that again would be followed by a succession of fragments,—a great cloud torn, so to speak, to ribbons,—each atom of which would transfigure itself upon the vast surface below.

Guy thought he could never tire watching these beautiful effects of sun and shade. The better to enjoy them, having finished his breakfast, he stretched himself at full length, with his elbow on the turf and his chin resting in his hollow palm.

The position was favourable to the quiet contemplation which he had, of late, learned so much to love; but it was also wonderfully conducive to slumber, particularly when, as in his case, there had been extraordinary emotion, inefficient rest, a long walk, a hot day, and a meal, despatched but a short while before.

At first, he but half closed his eyes, in order to observe the shadows under a different aspect, and then he found the sensation so agreeable, that he repeated the operation pretty frequently. At last, sleep, which had been watching its opportunity, persuaded him into closing them entirely,—only for a minute; but that minute was more than enough; for before two-thirds of the time had expired, he was wrapped in a deep and refreshing slumber.

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CHAPTER VI.

THE REST BY THE WAY—GUY'S VISITORS—A PERILOUS
POSITION—THE DANGER AVERTED.

IN ALF an hour, an hour passed away, and still Guy slumbered on.

He had gradually dropped from his reclining position into one that was entirely recumbent, and now lay as peacefully sleeping as though his head rested on the snow-white pillow at home.

During the whole of the time just mentioned he had been quite undisturbed by visitors, although he had had two who were not a little disconcerted by his presence there.

The first of these was a little field mouse, like himself cast early on the world to seek her livelihood. She came hopping on, till within a few feet of him, when perceiving his sleeping figure, and knowing from experience or instinct that there might be danger in approaching it too closely, she turned aside with a beating heart, and made the best of her way, in all speed, from so perilous a vicinity.

The second of his visitors was a young, giddy rabbit, which had wandered away from home for a little country walk. It came bounding along in the

boldest style up the hill, and, making an active jump, alighted almost beside the outstretched arm of Guy. Its alarm, on discovering the position into which it had inconsiderately leaped, was perfectly comic, for it turned nearly head over heels in its haste to get away, and got down the slope in about half the time it had taken to come up it.

Some twenty minutes more then elapsed, and still the boy slept on.

They had scarce expired, when two men might have been perceived mounting the hill in the direction of the Coty-house, and keeping close under the hedge, as though desirous of escaping too much observation.

They were both tolerably young, that is, under five-and-thirty years of age, and were dressed in the habit of labourers. It was very evident, however, from their hands, that they had not done much hard work of late; for, though they were dirty enough, they did not appear hardened and horned by honest toil.

One of them, the elder of the two, had a cast of face of a particularly sinister kind. He had a low, narrow forehead, with bushy eyebrows, which shaded a pair of cold blue eyes, while his nose had been flattened at some earlier period of his existence by a blow that had driven the bone right into the skull, and imparted a most disagreeable tone to his voice. A large mouth, with immense teeth a long way asunder, and a broad, massive chin, set round with

a bush of reddish hair, did not improve his appearance; and the face was rendered more unpleasant by the faded, parchment-tint of his complexion, which only exhibited a little redness where it would have been better away—that is, round about his broken nose.

The other's countenance was not quite so repulsive, but was sufficiently villanous notwithstanding. Dark brown circles were round his eyes, giving him a debauched and unhealthy expression; and there was a savage glare in the eyes themselves which produced a kind of shudder in a passer-by who gazed at him, and yet so fascinated the attention as to compel a second look.

They were talking in an under-tone as they came on, although there appeared no one in sight to overhear their conversation; but their whole manner was that of men whose actions and words would not bear too close a scrutiny.

"What the —— do you call that?" asked the younger of the two, as they came in sight of Kit's Coty-house, and stood still a moment to look at it.

"Only some —— big stones," answered the other indifferently. "I wish there was a pot o' beer on 'em, as I'm as thirsty as ——."

"Psht!" muttered the other softly, putting his hand on his companion's arm. "There mayn't be a pot o' beer *on* 'em, but there may be underneath."

"What do you mean?" inquired the other sulkily. "One would think you'd been reading a riddle-book

lately, for that's the second —— riddle you've been a trying on me this morning."

"Don't you see there's a young 'un asleep there?" asked the former speaker, with a savage leer in his eye, "and not a —— soul in sight."

His companion looked warily round, and then glanced at the sleeping boy, when he exchanged a significant look with the other, and they both drew with great caution nearer to the unconscious Guy.

As he did not change the position in which the man had first beheld him, they approached until they stood within a few feet of his sleeping-place, when they stopped still to exchange a few whispered words.

"That umbrella he's got there is a silk 'un, and nearly new. It'll fetch enough to lodge us for the night, when once we reach the town. And that bundle will supply bread and cheese, I should say, and something to drink."

The other nodded, and then said, "I shouldn't wonder, if his pockets was turned out, it would be worth the trouble, and I'm so —— thirsty—that I mean to try. You look after the umbrella and the bundle, and I'll do the rest."

"And if he should wake?"

The elder villain made no reply in words, but he showed his large teeth in a grin whose ferocity would not have disgraced a hyæna, and gently shook a strong and formidable stick which he carried in his right hand.

Thus resolved to commit any atrocity in the signs upon poor Guy's little property, the two cautiously drew towards him, one moving round to the right on the side where the urn — his sister Sophy's last gift — and his modest were lying, while the other advanced towards head for the purpose of ransacking his pocket.

Not a single human figure was at that moment in view to prevent, as it would seem, the perpetration of an act of robbery, if not of murder, on the person of the sleeping boy.

With the exception of the hedge, in the distance of which all was perfectly still, the country was unbroken, as has been observed, for miles on miles through the whole expanse no living thing was visible, saving the dumb animals grazing at intervals, and who had not the sense, even if they had the power, to prevent the meditated crime.

A few seconds more, and it would have been too late, and the slumbering lad perhaps dismissed for ever, or brained by a blow of the villain upon the face; for Guy had slept so long that the least thing now would suffice to wake him.

A few seconds more, and a frightful catastrophe might have made Kit's Coty-house a spot of more doubtful renown than it at present is, when the two villains abruptly desisted from their purpose, and looked at each other in alarm.

A sound had broken suddenly upon their ears which transfixed them for an instant, as if by

magic spell. And yet it was not of a nature which is thought capable generally of producing such effect and trepidation. It was the clear, ringing laugh of a happy girl, which pealed through the quiet atmosphere like the note of a trumpet, and was followed quickly after by the deeper tone of a man's voice.

The fellows shrunk from beside their intended victim like prowling wolves would do on the approach of the huntsman, and sought the cover of the hedge just as the flutter of a white dress appeared on the style, and a beautiful creature of some fourteen years, flushed with health and exercise, clambered hastily into the field, and ran with the utmost speed towards Guy's sleeping-place.

"Come, come, Alice, that's not fair," exclaimed a gentleman, who leaped the style a moment after. "You started off before I said the word, and you don't deserve the gloves, you little puss, although you've won them."

The young lady thus addressed by the name of Alice did not answer, for she had just become aware that she had woke up a boy from his slumbers at the very spot which was the goal of her race with her companion; and when the gentleman came up he found Alice standing still trying to look unconscious, while Guy, blushing to his temples, was gathering up his cap and umbrella and bundle to pursue his journey, which had been thus interrupted by his long and unintentional slumber.

Ere he had collected his little worldly goods and

scattered senses, the two first comers were increased by a party of some five or six others, who made noisy and laughing inquiries as to "who had won the race?" as they came across the style into the field.

Guy slowly moved towards the road in the direction they were coming, being the same by which he had himself reached the ancient Coty-house. As he did so he cast a second timid and admiring glance at the fairy-figure in white, whose sudden appearance upon the scene had so completely roused him.

Could he have known that the delicate little creature who returned his glance with a kind of patronising smile had probably saved his life, his look of admiration would have been intenser than it was.

The intervening hedge soon shut out the view of the pleasure-party, and as Guy again arrived upon the highroad, he observed a carriage with a pair of white horses, which had evidently conveyed the visitors thither.

The sight of the broad highway, however, soon brought back his thoughts into their former channel, and he resumed his journey with a steady pace, quite unaware of the danger he had incurred, and only congratulating himself on the refreshing nature of the sleep which had beguiled him at his halting-place.

And thus we all of us often take our way, unconscious of the perils by which we may be threatened,

and of the means by which the danger may be averted.

Let us, then, at all times cherish in our hearts deep gratitude to Heaven for the mercies constantly extended to us, for we know not how often its protection may have been vouchsafed !

CHAPTER VII.

ROCHESTER—REFLECTIONS ON THE BRIDGE—GRACE
—GUY'S UNCLE—A STRANGE RECEPTION.

GUY trudged manfully along the road, with a little bundle hooked on to the handle of his umbrella and carried over his shoulder. He was out meeting with any other incident of moment. As he came in sight of a few straggling houses, which he knew were within half a mile of Rochester,

His thoughts had been so busy by the way that he had been so refreshed by the sleep on Blenheim Hill, that he was surprised to find he had made so much progress. It was not, however, particularly so by the time he got into the crooked street constituting the main thoroughfare of the old town, that it was past two o'clock.

The savoury smell issuing from a cook-shop, the window of which was occasionally quite obscured by the unctuous steam that came rushing up from the area beneath, reminded him that he was very hungry, and it was not therefore surprising if the sight of some "beef-steak puddings," reeking hot from the saucepan, and labelled "fourpence each," proved too much for his philosophy to bear un-

He hesitated a moment between the gratification of his appetite—Guy always had a weakness for beef-steak puddings, and indeed for puddings of all kinds,—and a feeling of economy; but, considering that if he made a substantial meal now, he would be able to make it last him the day if needful, he easily persuaded himself that there was “wisdom and even saving in the pudding,” so voted for it accordingly.

It did not prove quite so nice as he anticipated. The meat, of which there was a wonderfully small allowance, was of that impracticable kind which only the very best of teeth could manage to separate, and the very strongest digestion convert into nutriment afterwards.

But Guy was of an age when the teeth are capable of almost anything, and when the digestion is only inferior to that of an ostrich. Besides, the crust was thick and tender enough, and if the pudding had been only less plentifully sprinkled with black pepper, it would not on the whole have been unpalatable. As it was, Guy got through it famously, and, barring that he was rather thirsty after it, felt tolerably satisfied.

“At all events,” he thought, as he left the shop, “I have had a rest, and as much dinner as I could eat, and altogether it has only cost me fivepence!”

Guy stopped a few moments on the ancient bridge to admire the grand old ruin of the castle, whose lower walls were clad with ivy, while numerous birds

whirled round and round the summits of the square towers, and in and out the huge rents which marked where windows once had been.

He could not help reflecting, as he looked upon the river, and bore in mind that it was the same stream which ran within a stone's throw of his late home, upon the probable occupations of the different members of the household at that moment.

"I wonder," he muttered to himself as he went on thinking, "how father took the letter I wrote him, and whether he is sorry or glad that I've left home. He should be very glad one would say; yet, somehow, perhaps not; perhaps after all, he didn't mean all he said. Well, he shouldn't have said so much. Poor, dear mother isn't glad, I know;—nor Sophy either. I suppose they're both busy in the house, and perhaps talking of me. They ought to be, if there's anything in one's ears burning, as old nurse used to say, for mine feel like two hot coals. Mary and Kate have gone back to school, and, I dare say, Willy too. They won't be able to understand why I've gone away. Any how, I've never been unkind to them, so that they can't feel glad of it, I should think. But won't dear mother be pleased to receive a letter from me, telling her I've got a capital situation? and Sophy? and—yes, and father too? And shan't I be proud to write and give them the news?——"

But here Guy stopped, for so far from his having any situation in view, he had only got over a third

of his journey to the great city, where he hoped that situation would be obtained.

The sight of some lads hard at work on board a river barge, which, laden with hay, was just shooting beneath one of the low arches of the bridge reminded him that he must stand no longer idling there, for that the position he sought was not likely to be found in the turbid stream which was eddying and frothing with anger at the obstruction to its passage offered by the bridge. He ought, he reflected, rather to take example of the river, which, in its eagerness to reach *its* object, the sea, allowed no obstacle or difficulty to stand in its way, but tried every means, and used every effort, until it overcame the impediment.

This notion engaged his mind, and led on to a second of a more common-place nature, until he left another old town, that of Stroud, behind him, and mounted the hill upon the Gravesend road.

When once the houses were cleared, Guy met but few persons on the way, and observed even fewer going in the same direction as himself. Those he did meet, were straggling soldiers or sailors, on their route to the Brompton barracks or the ships at Chatham; and he occasionally encountered a pedlar with his pack of wares strapped upon his back, under which he puffed and perspired as he walked along.

Guy himself was so capital a pedestrian, and so accustomed to exercise his limbs in long walks,

that he as yet felt but little fatigue, and he was, moreover, fortunate in having but a small package to carry.

By the time, however, he had got over a few more miles, and arrived at a point whence he had a view of the Thames, and obtained a distant sight of Gravesend, he was conscious that even *he* had walked sufficiently, and that a long night's rest would be required before he should feel equal to another such day.

Gravesend was the utmost limit to which Guy's travels had hitherto extended, and two years had elapsed since last he came so far.

Having on that occasion remained a few days in the town, he remembered enough of it to direct his steps with sufficient precision to the house then occupied by his uncle; for it was with his family he had spent the time mentioned.

His recollection had so far deceived him as to make him think the house, now that he at length stood before it, very much smaller than he conceived it to be. But there could be no mistake. This was the street, for he had seen the name written up at the corner as he came down; and it was the right number, too; for not only did he perfectly well remember that it was 16, but it was so put in the address on the little pencilled note given him by his mother.

He, therefore, without more ado, knocked at the dingy green door, and inquired, on the appearance

of a very little maid, with an exceedingly dirty face, whether Mr Waver was at home.

"Mr Waver doesn't live here," was the answer ; and before Guy could put a second question, the door was slammed in his face.

This was not an agreeable reception to a lad who had walked twenty miles, who was hungry, and tired, and thirsty ; and who had been pleasing his fancy for the last twenty minutes with the prospect of a comfortable "tea," and the sight of friendly faces round the table while he partook of it.

It was evidently quite useless to try again at No. 16. Either he must have mistaken the house, or his uncle must have left it ; and in neither case would he be likely to get intelligence about him from the girl with the unwashed face. So, after bethinking himself for a moment, he spied, a few doors off, a baker's shop, where he remembered the family used to deal.

Without loss of time he walked in, and as his step did not bring any one from the little room at the back, he knocked with his umbrella on the floor, when a red-faced man, in his shirt sleeves, and collar all open in the front, came out and asked him what he wanted.

"Please, sir," said Guy, "can you tell me where Mr Waver lives now ? The Mr Waver who used to be at No. 16 ?"

"What ! *you* want Mr Waver do you ?" said the man, in no very pleased tone of voice, while his red

face became a shade more purple. "And what may you want with Mr Waver?"

"I want to know where he lives," answered Guy, somewhat disconcerted by this strange mode of answering a question; "he is my uncle, and I want to see him, too."

"Oh! he's your uncle, is he. Well, when you see him, tell him he'd better be sharp in paying that bill of mine, or somebody else will want to see him too."

With that the man turned upon his heel, and was going back into the little room from which he had come out, when Guy, fearing that he should lose his chance of discovering his uncle if he let the ill-tempered baker go, called out:

"But that's not all I want."

"Well, what else?" asked the man, almost savagely.

"Why, one of those penny loaves, to be sure," said Guy; "a crusty one."

"Why didn't you say so at first?" grumbled out the man, as he went to the window to execute the large order.

"Because you didn't give me time," answered Guy, with a smile, as the man turned towards him.

Guy, as we have said, had not a prepossessing face, and he therefore laboured under the disadvantage of not being able to excite sympathy from a casual observer, or a person who saw him for the first time. It was necessary for people to know

him sufficiently well to penetrate beyond the outward features into the hidden depths of the heart, before they could feel any interest in the pale and rather sullen looking boy.

But nature had, by way of part compensation, bestowed on him an engaging smile and an agreeable voice; and it was this smile which met the baker's look as he passed the loaf over the counter.

Guy purposely fumbled some time in his pocket for the penny, while he said to the man in his most conciliatory tone:

"You told me to give a message to Mr Waver; but how am I to do it, if you don't tell me where I can find him."

"Well," observed the man, in a less sulky manner, while he dropped the penny through a hole in the counter into a closed till, where the coin was heard to jingle upon a heap of similar pieces,—
"Well, if you take the third turning to the right, and then the second to the left, until you come to 'Water Lane,' you'll find your uncle at No. 3. And don't forget the message," he bawled out, as Guy thanked him and left the shop.

The lad's face grew more grave as he went on, for he had begun to be sufficiently familiar with distress at home to discover at once that it existed also elsewhere.

It was pretty clear, from what he had already heard, that his uncle was so far from being in the position imagined by his mother, as to have actually

gone down in the world ; for he knew "Water Lane" to be a very inferior locality even to the one which Mr Waver used to live in ; and he naturally judged from the tone of the red-faced baker, that his uncle was in debt to that sullen tradesman, and was unable at the present time to pay the score.

Honestly resolving in his own mind that nothing should induce him to incur an obligation which he was unable to meet, and thus give a man, like this baker, a chance of speaking contemptuously of him to strangers, Guy, tired as he was, set out again in accordance with the man's instructions.

He duly passed down the third turning to the right, and was in sight of the second to the left, with "Water Lane" already visible, freshly painted on a wall, when a man came shuffling past him, whose features struck Guy as familiar.

Quickening his step, he was shortly abreast of the person in question, when, looking him steadfastly in the face, he inquired hesitatingly :

"I beg your pardon, sir, is not your name Waver?"

The man thus addressed started somewhat and reddened, but seeing it was a mere lad who spoke, answered :

"Yes, that is my name. What may be your business with me?"

"No business at all, uncle," replied Guy. "I am your nephew, Guy Rivers."

"God bless me," said the other, as he looked

intently at the youth, and then shook him lengthily by the hand,—“and so it is,—and so it is. How do you do, my boy? And how's your mother,—and father,—and all of you?”

“They are all pretty well, thank you, uncle; and perhaps this note will explain to you how it is I am here.”

Mr Waver took the note as they reached the entrance of the lane where his house was situated; but instead of going directly home with his nephew, as the latter expected, and indeed most devoutly wished, for the boy was almost tired out with his day's travels, he leaned his back against a wall, and carefully perused its pencilled contents.

While he was thus occupied, Guy on his part examined the figure before him, and could not help feeling the same disappointment at this first sight of his uncle, after two years' absence, as he had experienced on revisiting the house where he originally lived.

It was not merely that the lapse of time had grizzled his hair and whiskers, and set many more lines upon his brow; but it had also taken every idea of spruceness from his appearance, and set an unmistakable seal of shabby gentility,—with much more of shabbiness than of gentility,—upon his whole person.

The suspicions which had been aroused in the boy's mind from the little incident at the baker's shop, were considerably strengthened by this per-

sonal inspection, and they were presently confided by Mr Waver's manner.

"And so," he said at last, with a kind of abstraction, as though talking rather to himself than addressing Guy, for he was not looking at him; "so you have left home, and intend going to London to seek a situation, eh? Pity too; such a comfortable home, eh? And my sister wants to give you advice, eh? She couldn't have sent you to a much worse counsellor. So what do you intend to do?"

This last question was delivered after a pause and was certainly addressed to Guy point blank, however little the former part of his speech might have been. The lad, however, answered readily enough: "That's just what I came to ask my uncle. But before you answer it, hadn't we better go in? for I've walked all the way from Maidstone this morning, and I've scarcely got a leg to stand on."

"All the way from Maidstone this morning!" exclaimed Mr Waver, with raised eye-brows. "Very well, you must be tired, poor boy, eh? and no doubt you want your tea, eh?"

"I do indeed, uncle; but I want a rest a good deal more."

"Ah! I dare say you must be tired, you must be tired;" and this he repeated half a dozen times more without making any move towards his study, but looking vacantly on the wall opposite

if turning something over in his mind. At length he brightened up a little, and said—

“Well, come along, my dear boy, and we'll see and get you some tea and a rest,” at the same time turning back the way he had come, with Guy beside him.

“I thought, uncle,” said the latter, after they had walked for a few seconds, “that you lived at No. 3, Water Lane?”

“Yes,” he answered, hesitatingly, “and so I do, my boy; but—but—the house is a little in—confusion;—and—your aunt is not very well, and—”

“Oh! I'm sorry for that,” said Guy. “Has she been unwell long?”

“Well—no;—not long; that is—not more than a twelvemonth, hm!”

This was said with so absent a manner, and was so evidently uttered by the speaker without his being conscious of what he was saying, that Guy began to feel quite uncomfortable, for he could not help coming to the conclusion that his uncle was not perfectly right in his mind. All further conjecture was, however, cut short by Mr Waver's entering a small tavern, the door of which he held open for his nephew to pass through.

Guy followed close upon his heels, wondering all the time at the whole proceeding; and he still more wondered when Mr Waver took him into a small parlour with a sanded floor, which had an abominable smell of porter and stale pipes, tempered though

by the fragrant breath of numerous wall-flowers, whose homely but delicious perfume came surging through the open window from a little piece of garden ground beyond.

No one was in the room when they entered. It was too late and too early for the majority of its frequenters. Mr Waver motioned his nephew to a chair, and, telling him he would be back directly, abruptly left the place.

Guy willingly turned from the polished table, on which were a few stands for pewter pots, a tray full of clay pipes, and a quantity of thin, wooden matches, to the open window, out of which he thrust his head to inhale the more agreeable odour of the flowers; and it was while he was thus occupied that his uncle returned, a little flushed in the face, and said to him, while he shook him all the time by the hand—

“It’s all right, my boy; they’ll bring you some tea, and some bread and butter, and some shrimps; do you like shrimps? capital place Gravesend for shrimps!” and Mr Waver smacked out his lips, and shook his head gravely, as if he were uttering a gastronomic opinion of the greatest moment which no one could think of disputing; and then continued—“and I’ve engaged you a bed, so that you may be all nice and comfortable, eh! and I’ll give you a look in to-morrow, and we’ll have a talk, eh! so good night, my dear boy, good night, good night.” And this he continued to repeat until he reached the door, and even after he closed it, if Guy could

judge by the sound of his voice as he left the house.

Guy sat, in an uncertain state of mind, for some ten minutes after Mr Waver had left him. But he was too tired almost to think of the oddness of his uncle's manner, and his strange proceeding in bringing him to this little public-house, instead of taking him to his own home, even although he might not have had convenience to sleep him for a night.

At the end of the time mentioned, a man with a bald head, and a white apron tied round a body as capacious as a beer-barrel, and who was evidently the landlord of the inn, came waddling into the parlour, and with his legs very wide apart, the better to support his portly person, sat himself down opposite our friend Guy.

He was a business man, there could be no doubt of that, and did not like wasting time in useless words, for he opened the conversation at once, with,

"The old one who has just gone out says you want some tea and a bed, young gentleman. Is that correct?"

"Why, yes," said Guy, a little astonished. "He brought me in here on purpose."

"Then I suppose you've got the ready to pay for them?" said the landlord, in an inquiring tone.

Guy was not long in answering this question, too; but before he did so, there ran a train of reasoning through his mind, which was not particularly favourable to his uncle. He could not help reflecting that,

if his eccentric relative didn't intend to pay for his entertainment, he had no right to bring him into the house without a previous inquiry as to his means of settling his account; but the youth was now there, and felt that he required both food and rest, so he said—

"Of course I have; that is," he cautiously added, "if you don't charge me too much for them."

"I won't do that," answered the man: "only what's fair and right. But you see, the old one," jerking his head towards the door by which Mr Waver had made his exit, "the old one wanted me to *book it*; and as I've booked already a lot more things for the same quarter, I think my missus is right, and that a stop must be put somewhere."

"Well," said Guy, a little reddening, "I don't want you to book anything for me. Tell me what you'll charge for my tea and bed, and I'll see whether I can afford it."

"Will a couple of shillings hurt you?" inquired the landlord.

"No," answered Guy, after a moment, "I can manage that. So let me have the tea at once, please, for I've walked a good many miles to-day, and I shall be glad to get to bed."

"You shall have it in a jiffy," said the man, raising his capacious person from the chair, by placing his hands upon the table; "and the bed shall be ready for you as soon after it as you like;" and with that, he waddled out of the room.

The landlord was as good as his word, for a minute or two afterwards, a young woman brought in a tray which contained, not only a nice little brown tea-pot full of the refreshing beverage, with a good crusty loaf and some butter, but a plateful of the capital shrimps eulogised by Mr Waver.

The sight of these appetising little animals brought that strange individual again to Guy's mind, but he did not just then trouble himself much about anything. He ate and drank till his hunger and thirst were fully satisfied ; and having spread the remainder of the butter on the penny loaf he had bought of the surly baker, and consigned it again to his pocket, so as to make it serve for breakfast next morning, he was glad when the approach of night enabled him to retire to his bed-room, which he did the more readily, as sundry persons began to drop into the little parlour, and call for pints of beer and pipes.

The same girl who had brought in his tea, showed him to a small room at the top of the house, where he found a simple but clean looking bed, which appeared very inviting to his wearied feelings ; and asking her to wake him at six next morning, Guy bade her "good night," and was soon sleeping without the disturbance of even a dream.

CHAPTER VIII.

A FRESH DEPARTURE—GUY'S BREAKFAST AND REFLECTIONS
—THE HOUSE ON WHEELS—THE SICK CHILD.

THESE had been a good many knocks next morning at the door of the chamber where Guy slept, before he was sufficiently aroused to reply to them.

"Six o'clock, sir!" repeated for the fourth or fifth time by the voice of the girl who had shown him to his room the evening before, was at length responded to by a hearty "thank you," from Guy; and in a few minutes more, he was out of bed, and plunging his face deeply into a large basin of water.

"What a lucky thing it is," he exclaimed, on throwing up the window and inhaling the fresh air, as it blew across the river, "What a lucky thing it is that the weather keeps so fine! What a glorious morning! And what a long way I've got to go before night! Now, ought I to call on my uncle before I leave this place? I should say not. If he'd wanted me at his house, he would have invited me there last night;—but he didn't do anything of the sort, but brought me here instead. From what I can see, he's not likely to be of any use to me; and as I can do

him no good, why we'd better go our different ways. I'm sorry too, for I'm sure my good mother thought he would be able to do a great deal for me, and even, perhaps, find me some employment in Gravesend. Oh, dear! he seems to want all the assistance he can get for himself, as far as I can see. No! There's no other course for me, but London. And I can't have a better. Once in London, and I don't fear the rest. Only I do wish I knew somebody there, for it must be very different being a stranger in a great place like that, and a town like Maidstone. Well, courage! And Guy Rivers shall make his fortune like Whittington, before he has done!"

Thus communing with himself, half aloud, Guy finished his dressing, and having again put his little bundle over the handle of his umbrella, he descended the stairs to the bar.

While he was paying his modest bill, the chambermaid told him that, after he was gone to bed, the old gentleman came back to see him, but that on learning he had retired for the night, had walked off again, repeating to himself, "All the way from Maidstone,—the boy must be knocked up."

"Did he leave no message for me?" asked Guy of the girl, who had been laughingly imitating the tone and manner, as well as the words of his strange relative.

"No, none," she answered; "he went away at once, mumbling to himself all the way down the steps."

"Well, if he comes again," said Guy, "please tell him that I'm off,—he knows where; will you?"

"Of course I will. Anything else?"

"No, thank you," answered Guy; "only I wish I was richer, to give you something for your trouble."

"Well, I suppose you're not so poor but that you can give me a kiss, eh?" said the girl archly.

"Two if you like, for the matter of that," replied Guy, suiting the action to the word.

"That'll do," she suddenly exclaimed, as she drew away her face on hearing a step descending the stairs. "You're all alike," she continued, laughing, "young and old,—you never have enough."

Guy laughed too; and giving her a little nod, bade her good-bye and quitted the house.

He was impelled by curiosity, and partly by a better feeling, to take "Water Lane" in his way, carefully examining No. 3, as he stood in front of it.

The house was very small, and from the appearance of the blinds and short curtains with which its little windows were shaded, had an air of poverty that quite pained him.

No one seemed to be as yet stirring about the place, so his last lingering hope of having a parting word with his uncle, gradually vanished from his mind. Still, he did not like quitting the place without a notice to his mother's brother; so he wrote with a pencil on a little scrap of paper, "Good-bye, uncle, I'm off to London.—Your affectionate nephew, Guy Rivers."

Having placed this beneath the street-door, he gave another glance at the windows, which were still closely shut, and proceeded on his way.


Guy felt his limbs very stiff on first commencing his journey, but that feeling gradually wore off as he went along; and after he had got over a few miles, he had little fear of not being able to reach London that same night.

He took his first rest and breakfast at an open space in the bank by the road side, where a spring of fresh water, having wormed its way almost invisibly down a grassy slope, fell over some broken earth and stones into a hollow, whence it murmured down to the bottom of the hill over which the road-way climbed.

Guy seated himself on a broad, flat stone, and sucked up the cool and refreshing water through a reed, which he cut for the purpose, while he munched his buttered roll with the contentment of a philosopher.

The weather was so beautiful, and the air which was abroad was so charged with the perfume of fresh grass and clover, that, combined with the sights and sounds about him, they produced a most exhilarating effect upon the mind of the imaginative youth.

He inhaled with delight the health-giving breath of nature in one of her most loveable moods. He listened, with a sensation of pleasure he had rarely before experienced, to the intricate song of the lark, as it soared higher and yet higher into the soft blue



atmosphere, until human sight could no longer distinguish its form. His eye wandered with charmed attention over the opposite hedge into the fields beyond, and to the beautiful tract of country miles again beyond the fields, where the tall elms and spreading oaks stood watching their shadows cast upon the green turf at their feet; and his ear was soothed by the monotonous yet never-tiring accompaniment of the little spring as it pursued its course through earth and stones to the basin at his feet, and then travelled on its way.

All was harmonious and delightful, and the sense of independence working in his own breast naturally prepared him to enjoy it to the full.

What a peaceful life, ran his train of thought, must be that of the hermits I have read of, who make their home in some romantic cavern on the mountain-side, far removed from the cares and struggles of life, and who supply with the labour of their own hands their few and simple wants! In the far countries where these men follow such a life, in Italy and the East, I am told that the climate is so beautiful that it is nearly a perpetual summer, and that the ground yields, almost without working, sufficient for the necessities of men.

As he arrived at this point of his meditations, the sound of some conveyance coming along the road made him turn his head in that direction.

It was a travelling-van, like a tiny house on wheels, drawn by a poor hack of a horse, and a

donkey in not much better plight. It was probably on its way to some country fair, and intended, perhaps, when it arrived at its destination, to make a grand display in the shape of a public exhibition or a raree-show, for huge rolls of canvass were strapped to its sides, and numerous trestles and planks were ingeniously swung beneath the body of the vehicle.

A man and a boy walked beside the horse's head, their bronzed faces and dusty clothes betraying long exposure to the sun and road; while a couple of dogs, as dusty as the male personages of the caravan, trudged behind, with tongues protruding considerably from their red and dripping mouths.

The man stopped his animals as he perceived the water, and while untying a bucket with the view to filling it, Guy's attention was attracted to the little open door of the van, which was now brought opposite his resting-place.

The sight which there met his eyes quite fascinated him.

In a low chair placed half within and half outside the vehicle, or *parlour* of the house, was a little girl about the age of his sister Kate—that is, some ten or eleven years old. She was sadly pale, the whole features of the face being white and shining as he had seen a piece of waxwork out of which all rosy colour had faded. Golden hair of the softest texture fell on either side of her pallid cheeks on to her shoulders; and her wan hands, with long, thin

fingers, clasped the elbows of the wooden chair, so as to steady herself during the jolting along the road. But it was her eyes which most riveted Guy's wondering look. They were so large, and round, and blue, and wore in them so deep a feeling of long suffering, and a something more which was scarcely of this world, that the youth felt troubled as he gazed, and found a dimness come over his own sight, which he was forced to remove more than once with the back of his hand.

On looking a second time, while the man was still engaged getting the bucket or pail, the cord of which had got entangled, Guy perceived that a woman was inside the van, busied on some piece of coarse needle-work.

Guy rose up from his hard seat beside the spring when the man came towards it, with the intention of continuing his way, but, still attracted by the sight of the sick girl, he drew a little nearer to what may be called the "street-door" of the moveable house.

At that moment the girl said in a faint tone, as she looked towards the fresh-running fluid, which glistened in the sunshine, that she should like a drink.

Guy caught the words, and, moved by an irresistible impulse, stepped hastily towards her, and inquired whether he should get her some of the water.

The girl's eyes brightened strangely as the lad made the offer, and repaid it with a sickly smile, but she said nothing. The woman, however, came forward, and seeing the man engaged watering the

horse, and the boy busied cutting a stick from the hedge, she thanked Guy, and said, "Yes, if he didn't mind;" at the same time turning to reach a mug from a hook on which it hung.

The girl meanwhile fixed her large blue eyes full upon Guy with an expression which he could not understand, but he was struck by the contrast between her fair skin and delicate hands and the swarthy complexion of the woman, which was but a shade less dark and sunburnt than that of the man and boy, while her hair was black as jet.

Taking the mug, Guy ran with it to the spring, and brought it back filled with the cold and refreshing water.

The girl held out her hands to take it from him, but they trembled so that Guy half feared she would let it drop. She held the mug, however, tightly with her long, thin fingers, and slowly drank down a portion of its contents.

Guy remembered that he had in his pocket a perfectly bright and new penny, and while the sick girl kept the mug to her mouth he drew it out. When she had done, he seized the opportunity of the woman's head being thrust out of one of the small windows, where she was talking to the man, to say to the poor sufferer, "Will you have this, little girl, as a keepsake?"

He accompanied the offer with one of his sweetest smiles, which awoke another strange look on the face of the child. She took it from him, with a

faint "thank you," and then held it in her thin white palm for a few seconds on her knee, without speaking.

Suddenly, she raised her head as if an idea had struck her, and glanced eagerly round to see whether the woman was looking. Observing her still engaged, she thrust her hand into the bosom of her frock and drew out a small white handkerchief, which she offered to Guy.

He shook his head by way of refusal; but she said impatiently, in a hoarse whisper, "Take it,—take it; for my sake."

Guy, impressed by her manner, accepted the little gift, which, in obedience to another impatient motion on her part, he put into his pocket. At the same moment the woman drew in her head, and said, as Guy returned her the mug:

"Thank'ee, my boy; we're now off again;" and at the same moment the van was put in motion.

Guy waved his hand by way of farewell, and stood in the same place until the vehicle rounded the corner. As long, however, as he could distinguish, the girl's eyes were fixed upon him, with the look she gave him at parting, and which seemed to bid him and the world "good bye" for ever!

When the sound of the retiring van was no longer audible, Guy turned to renew his journey, and for some time afterwards puzzled himself with conjectures about the poor sick child and her strange look and manner.

The thought of her naturally induced him to draw from his pocket the little handkerchief she had forced upon him.

It was of fine material, though very small, and as he held it up, he perceived in the corner, worked in red silk, the name "Ellen L."

"Surely," he muttered to himself, "that gipsy woman can't be her mother, or that man her father. They don't to me look like her relations at all. What a strange thing of her to make me take this pretty little handkerchief! I suppose it was because I gave her that penny, and she didn't like the idea of accepting it without my having something of hers in return. But I'm sure she needn't have thought that, poor little thing! How ill she looked! and how dreadful it must be to be ill in such a place, exposed to the air and bad weather and draughts, and perhaps the people not too kind to her! Oh, dear!"

If Guy had pushed his reflections a little further, he might have found in the incident of this poor sick child a moral to his fancy picture of the hermit life, which he had been contemplating so complacently when the van came in view.

He had, in his imagination, drawn his hermit in such weather as then shone upon himself, and with the health and strength which he felt coursing through his own veins. He did not admit into his portrait the possibility of sickness, of accident, or the many chances of storm and tempest to which

men would naturally, under such circumstances, be exposed. If he could have contemplated, what in fact has more than once occurred, a broken limb disabling the hapless anchorite, and compelling him to starve and miserably die where he fell, until his whitened bones were discovered years afterwards by a stray foot which happened to pass that way, he would surely have confessed the truth of the Scripture saying, "It is not good that man should be alone."

CHAPTER IX.

AN ADVENTURE—MR AND MRS TOTTLES—TRUE KINDNESS
—A SILENT COMPANION—FIRST SIGHT OF LONDON.

THE incident related at the close of the last chapter occurred within a mile or so of the old town of Dartford, through whose dull and uninteresting streets Guy passed about half an hour afterwards.

He only stopped there a sufficient time to purchase a penny loaf and a cold sausage, which he saw displayed among some other similar edibles in a shop window.

"They'll make me a capital dinner," he said to himself, as he wrapped them in a piece of paper, begged from the shop-woman for the purpose, and stowed them carefully away in his jacket pocket.

When again upon the road, after leaving the town a mile or so behind him, he met, as before, so few pedestrians, that often, for ten good minutes together, he was entirely alone, and had but occasionally to draw close up on one or the other side of the highway, when a stage coach or waggon or some other vehicle came rumbling along it.

As it happened that some fresh flint stones had been recently laid down for a long distance on each

side, and there was no footpath at the point that Guy had reached, he walked along in the middle of the road, so as to save his boots and feet from being cut to pieces. He had just turned a corner where a branch road ran into the one along which he was marching, when a chaise-cart, driven at great speed, came behind him unawares, and narrowly escaped knocking him down. At the same time, the driver of the conveyance, a well dressed, but irascible looking little man, as he partly reined in his horse, saluted him with :

"Why don't you look where you're going, you young stupid? I might have run over you!"

Half the words did not reach Guy's ear, for the speaker gave his horse the rein, and was soon bowling along in a cloud of dust.

"*I might say,*" said Guy, by way of criticism on the other's impatient speech, "*Why don't you look where you are going to ; driving along at that rate? Hulloo! what's yonder?*"

The cause of his exclamation was a very neat and rather large brown paper parcel in the middle of the road, about a dozen paces ahead of him, and which had evidently been dropped from some conveyance.

"It must have tumbled out of that chaise-cart," said Guy, as he picked it up, at the same time setting off at his utmost speed after the vehicle that had nearly cut short his own career, and exclaiming every now and then at the top of his voice, "*Ay Ay!!*" to attract the driver's attention.



GUY AND THE LOST PARCEL.



He must have run for a good quarter of an hour without stopping; and but that his limbs and "wind" were sound, and he had been accustomed to such exercise, he never could have kept up so long. Still, the chaise-cart was not in sight, although Guy could hear it on a-head, and was occasionally well powdered by the dust it had raised in passing.

His exertions were at length crowned with success. A flock of sheep, coming in an opposite direction and spreading all over the road, compelled the vehicle to come to a stand, and Guy managed to catch a glimpse of it.

He hallooed with all his remaining strength, as the chaise, freed from the last straggling sheep, was about to dash on again with renewed speed.

The driver heard the shout, and turning round his head, perceived our friend Guy, who held up the parcel to make him stop.

This he did very willingly, while the lad made his way through the bleating animals; for the man saw at a glance that the parcel held in Guy's hand was one which had escaped from his own conveyance, through the accidental bursting open of the enclosed box behind.

As Guy, panting for breath, covered with dust, and with the perspiration running in streams from beneath his cap and down his face, came up to the chaise, he laid his hand upon the shaft, while he delivered the parcel to the man, who was hearty in his thanks for the return of his property.


He offered Guy a shilling for the service he had done him, at which the lad shook his head, but did not remove his hand from the shaft, for he felt a dizziness come over him, such as he had never before experienced.

The man at once perceived that the youth was thoroughly exhausted with the exertion he had used, and being naturally of a kindly nature, and conscious that this faintness had been caused in doing himself a service, he made Guy get into the vehicle beside him, and lent him his assistance, as well as his horse would permit him, to mount up.

As soon as Guy was comfortably seated, the man set off again, but much more gently than before, looking round occasionally into Guy's face, to see how it fared with him, and saying every now and then a kind word or two of encouragement.

The repose and the air together gradually brought the lad to himself; and a glass of ale and a biscuit, which were obtained at a little roadside inn, contributed entirely to restore him.

When this pleasing result was attained, Guy's companion became very chatty, and soon informed him that his name was Tottles; that he kept a general shop for the sale of grocery, stationery, and crockery ware, at Bexley, which place they were now approaching; and that the parcel that Guy had picked up was one entrusted to him by a friend, containing a valuable shawl, to be forwarded to a gentleman in London. "I can't conceive," said Mr



Tottles, "how the fastening of that boot could have come undone ; it never played me such a trick before ; I must have it looked to."

After all this information volunteered about himself and his concerns by the loquacious Mr Tottles, Guy could scarcely do less than impart to him so much of his own past history and present purpose as he thought it prudent to communicate to a stranger. Indeed, if he had not told so much of his own accord, his companion would soon have drawn it out of him, for he seemed as inquisitive about other people's affairs as he was ready to reveal his own.

"And so," he said, after he had learned and obtained all he could from Guy—"and so you are going up to London to seek your fortune ? And a very good thing, too, *I* say. I like your spirit, my lad ; and if you manage to keep it up, and be always *as honest*—mind, that's a great point, a *very* great point in London, and everywhere else for the matter of that—as you've been to-day, I don't see any reason why you shouldn't succeed."

"I am glad you think so," said Guy ; "at all events, I mean to do my best. I want to gain my own living, and not be beholden to anybody. Unluckily, I don't know a soul in London when I get there ; that's the only thing that troubles me."

"Well," observed Mr Tottles, as he drew in his lips and looked straight at his horse's ears, while he gently removed from one of them, with his whip, a fly of an inquiring mind—"well, now, that is a

difficulty, certainly. London, you see, is a big place—a very big place; indeed, I may say, no end of a place—and, though there's almost everything in it one wants, it isn't so easy to *find* it, as a good many folks know."

They rode on for some few minutes after Mr Tottles had delivered himself of this opinion, without speaking. But that worthy tradesman was evidently cogitating something in his mind, for his head fidgeted about from side to side more than could be occasioned by the unevenness of the road; and his nose twitched and his lips moved in a way that proved they were worked upon by some cords of feeling within.

His mouth at length opened; and he said, slowly and deliberately, "I'll tell you what we'll do. You shall come home with me and have a bit o' dinner and a good long rest—I'm sure my old woman will be glad to see you—and that will give you fresh heart and strength to continue your road, as you say you mean to reach London to-night. I know a man in London, in a good way of business, a bookseller and stationer—in fact, he supplies me with my stationery—and, though I've never seen him, we've dealt together for years, and he's never had to ask me for a penny. I always pay as I go; that's *my* way of doing business. I'll give you a letter to him, and I'll say all the good of you I can. Of course, I don't know anything about you except what you've told me; but you seem a respectable sort of lad, and

have had a good education ; and, from what I've had occasion myself to see, you're *honest* and *persevering*, for you returned me my parcel when you might have kept it if you'd been so minded, and almost made yourself ill in doing it. So I think I am quite safe in saying *that* much."

As Mr Tottles here stopped to take breath, Guy thanked him warmly for these kind intentions on his behalf, and assured him he should never have cause to regret the assistance he would thus render him.

"I hope not," said Mr Tottles ; "I hope not ; and, more than that, I don't think I shall. But yonder's Bexley church ; we shall be there in five minutes."

And so they were ; and, five minutes after that, Guy was sitting in a little back room, which had a door and a tiny curtained window looking on to the shop ; and when the former was opened, he caught a glimpse of sundry canisters marked with most of the letters of the alphabet, arranged in a row ; and two pairs of scales dangling from the ceiling over the counter ; and sundry drawers labelled with all sorts of inscriptions in faded gold ; and quite a little army of crockery ware, drawn up with military precision, from the entrance to the bottom of the shop, as though guarding the approaches to the inner citadel where he was seated.

A little woman in a snow-white cap—Mr Tottles' old woman, indeed, as he had called her, although she was not so old either—bustled about and got dinner ready ; and, in a very short space of time, Mr

Tottles himself, having seen to his horse and unpacked his cart, made his appearance, with a white apron before him, and the coat he had worn upon the journey exchanged for another which had seen so much service that it was quite polished in the operation. Mr Tottles still wore his hat—not the same one, of course, but a hat which had done good duty, like the coat; for Mr Tottles was never known, by his most intimate acquaintance, to go without that covering. Some persons, who pretended to be well informed on the subject, affirmed that he even slept in it; but that must have been a libel, for why should there be hanging on the line in the back-yard, every six weeks, half a dozen cotton night-caps, if Mr Tottles went to bed in his hat?

Notwithstanding this peculiarity, and many others that Guy had an opportunity of observing during the couple of hours they spent together, the youth saw enough of him and of his wife to be convinced that he might travel far before a worthier couple could be met with, or people more kindly, charitable, and God-fearing.

And yet, if Guy had had no further opportunity of learning Mr Tottles' character than what would have been afforded him by the few seconds at their first meeting, he would have pronounced that excellent tradesman an ill-tempered man, who was not particularly careful of the lives of his fellow-creatures.

"It's very fortunate, Master Guy," said Mr Tottles,

"that my apprentice has to drive to Shooter's Hill this afternoon with some goods that we have orders to send there. He'll have the pony-cart, and will give you a lift as far as he goes."

"Thank you very much," exclaimed Guy. "I don't know anything about these places, but I've heard of Shooter's Hill, and that it isn't very far from London."

"Only some eight or nine miles," said Mr Tottles. "You go down the hill, across Blackheath, down Blackheath Hill. Get into the London Road, and you're all right."

"That will be famous!" said Guy, who seemed to think that when once he reached London the victory was gained, although, indeed, the battle was then to be begun.

Mr Tottles shortly retired to a little desk in the corner of the shop, where Guy, as he sat chatting with his wife, saw him elaborating, with great care, the epistle which was to serve him as a passport and letter of introduction to the Great World.

However clever that worthy tradesman might be in the keeping of his books and management of his business, it was clear that letter-writing was not an art in which he excelled, or if it were, it as evidently cost him no small amount of labour to accomplish. In the course of it he scratched his head so energetically that it almost drove his hat from off his cranium, and it might be seen, now resting on his right shoulder, now on his left, now thrust so far

back that it reposed on the tips of his ears and his coat-collar, and then it would be pulled over his eyes to such an extent that one would have thought he wished to obtain the necessary concentration of mind by burying his whole head, face and all, in the depths of that familiar covering.

A gleam of triumph appeared at length upon Mr Tottles' visage, and a sweet serenity overspread his features. The letter was done, and he was evidently proud of it, for he was seen to read it over with the greatest care, his lips moving and his body swaying to and fro on the high stool, while he gently rubbed his open palms over his chubby knees.

"There! Master Rivers," he said, as he put the wafered epistle a few minutes afterwards into Guy's hand. "There! That's the address—'Mr Bindwell, 208, Fleet Street, London;' and any one will show you the place. And now, as William's at the door and ready to start, the sooner you go the better. Any more beer? No! Well, good bye, my boy. I shall be glad to hear from you and to see you again, and I wish you all sorts of luck and happiness. God bless you."

And he wrung Guy's hand as heartily as though he had been a dear relation, or as one would think a dear relation *ought* to do, and so did Mrs Tottles; and they both followed him out to the door, and saw him get into the cart, and watched him and waved their hands until a bend in the street shut him from their view.

The apprentice, William, with whom Guy performed the next stage of his journey, was about the most silent individual our young friend had ever been fated to know, and was, therefore, a direct contrast to his former travelling companion.

Guy could have actually counted off on his fingers the number of words uttered by that personage during their short journey; and as he found that all his attempts to draw him into conversation utterly failed, Guy himself relapsed into silence, in which state the ground was at length got over.

Full as the lad's mind naturally was of his prospects, and interested as he felt with the progress of his journey, which was thus bringing him nearer to the goal he sought, he would have preferred to find beside him a person to whom he could impart some of the superabundance of his feelings, and from whom he might gather a few hints about the vast city he was approaching.

Ten minutes of time were sufficient to convince him that William Snape was not that person, for to most of Guy's questions he returned a monosyllabic "No" or "Yes," and to many only shrugged his shoulders or twisted his features into a grimace.

"Stop here," he said at length, as, having arrived nearly at the summit of a hill, he pulled up at a lodge-gate giving entrance to large grounds.

"Is this Shooter's Hill, then?" inquired Guy.

The apprentice only nodded his head by way of answer.

"Do you go no further?" asked Guy.

William shook his head.

"Which, then, is my road?"

The young man pointed with his whip along the highway, and opening his lips, let drop the syllables, "Straight on."

"Thank you," said Guy. "Good bye."

Not even these words of parting could induce the taciturn apprentice to speak again. He merely made another motion with his head by way of farewell, and proceeded to ring at the gate of the lodge, thus dismissing all other subjects from his mind but the single one of his errand. Guy therefore left him to his own thoughts, whatever they might be, and pursued the road pointed out to him.

But that a mist had sprung up during the last hour or two, which veiled great part of the distant landscape, he would have been enabled from the summit of the hill that he was crossing to get his first view of the metropolis. As it was, in ignorance that the cloud which obscured the horizon shut out the prospect of his self-promised land of fame and fortune, he plodded on his way, eagerly examining each mile-stone that silently told him what space had yet to be got over.

The sight of Blackheath, opening for many an acre before him, bordered on one side by the richly-foliaged trees of Greenwich Park, and seeming to stretch out to an almost unlimited extent in the opposite direction, excited the lad's wonder and de-

light; and from the noble aspect of the few houses which met his view, shaded as they were by lofty elms, he began to feel a consciousness that he was fast approaching the capital.

Having crossed the Heath, where he noticed various parties of youths—apparently schools—engaged in the noble games of cricket, rounders, and what not, resisting with a firmness that argued well for the solidity of his character the strong inclination he felt to stop and enjoy the sight, he arrived in view of the “Green Man,” an extensive tavern that stands at the top of Blackheath Hill, and was about to descend the highroad, which he observed to be finely lined with houses having tall trees before them.

A finger-post had a few moments before informed him that this was the way to London; but as he began to feel somewhat wearied with the sun and dust, he thought it would be a good opportunity to obtain a final rest before marching on to the metropolis, more especially as it was not probable, he argued, that he should find many more grassy nooks to sit down upon before arriving at the stone-paved city.

Looking about him for a spot adapted to his purpose, he espied, a little to the right, a broad space of the delicious mossy turf, with which the greater part of the Heath was covered.

To this he lost no time in repairing, and was pleased to find that there were comparatively but few people upon it.

Observing a seat quite unoccupied at the further extremity, he went towards it, and, as he did so, perceived to his astonishment an enormous expanse of country opening before his eyes, of which he could not, from the road, have had the slightest conception.

Wondering and admiring as he went, he quickened his steps, until, on reaching the bench, upon which he dropped rather than seated himself, he beheld before him and beneath him, one of those prospects which never fail, when once seen, to make an indelible impression upon the mind.

He was, in fact, placed on the so called "Point" of Blackheath, the extremity of that huge gravel and sand hill, which, having been excavated for various purposes during a course of years, shelves down from that particular locality, to a considerable depth, in the shape of a very cataract of stones.

But how grand, how exciting, how full of subject for deep thought and admiration was the view which Guy drank in, with an insatiable thirst, as though he would never feel repletion!

His notice was first caught by the town of Greenwich, set in a semicircle at his feet, with the vast quadrangles of the Hospital displayed beneath him, as though depicted in a well designed map, or as he had seen in models exhibited by architects in his native place.

The broad, glistening river next attracted his

attention, bearing on its bosom more than one noble three-masted vessel, and dotted with small boats ; for, at the period of our story, steamers had not yet begun to furrow the waters, and supersede to a great extent the use of the smaller craft.

But why did Guy's look suddenly become so intense ? and why did his flushed cheek suddenly blanch as he gazed on into the far distance ?

His eye, in tracing the direction of the river, and drawn admiringly from point to point by the increased number of masts of vessels, arrived at last at a spot where a forest of spars appeared inextricably entangled, as though all the ships of the earth had there congregated together ; and it was while marvelling at this, to him, extraordinary spectacle, that a sudden shifting of a mist, which, as we have observed, veiled the distant prospect, opened to the spell-bound gaze of the wondering youth a very wilderness of houses, piled one upon the other, and stretching in endless lines to the right hand and to the left ; with countless spires rising from the midst ; and in the centre, a pile of surprising beauty, surmounted by a dome, which seemed the crown and seal of the fair prospect.

Guy needed not the remark of a lady, who at that moment stood within a few paces of him, and who was admiring, with a companion, the splendour of the view, to learn that what he saw before him was LONDON,—the London of his waking dreams,—the place where he proposed his future days should be

spent,—the city which contained all his hopes of subsistence, of fortune, of renown!

He sat there for a good hour, feasting his eyes and his imagination on the distant labyrinth of men's dwellings, and weaving in his fancy a very tissue of situations and conjectures, not one of which would, in all probability, ever be realized.

For the whole time did he sit thus occupied, and perhaps would have remained an hour longer, but that the departure of the sun, and a gradual fall of the shades of evening over the landscape, wrapping its more remote features in obscurity and diminishing the sharp outlines of those which were nearer his eye, convinced him it was time that he should resume his journey; for he knew not as yet where he should that night lay his head.

As this thought came fully upon him, he rose up from his bench, and, retracing his steps to the point where he had diverged from the road, he began descending the hill, just as the busy lamp-lighter, with ladder on his shoulder and lantern in his hand, was hastening from post to post, engaged in dotting the road side with specks of equi-distant light.

CHAPTER X.

THE APPROACH TO LONDON—THE "SPARROW AND POST"
—AN UNEXPECTED RECEPTION—MRS WARKUP.

EACH building that Guy now passed upon his onward road had a special and increasing interest for him, due to the fact, that it stood nearer to the great metropolis.

Such feeling could not have been excited by the edifices themselves, for at the period we speak of there were scarce any of sufficient mark to call for particular notice.

He duly passed through the Broadway at Deptford, and the little village of Newcross, consisting at that time of a few straggling, low-browed, wooden cottages, until he reached the lonely piece of road extending to the so-called Half-way House.

The excitement which the constant spectacle of houses had raised within him, and which had served to sustain his tired limbs, began to fail him as he traversed this solitary tract; for at the period in question it was dimly lighted with but a few gas-lamps—gas being comparatively but of recent application in illuminating the streets,—and after night-fall, was travelled over but by few wayfarers.

And night had now fallen ; so that the obscurity and dulness together began to affect the lad's spirits, and make his legs drag somewhat heavily after each other.

"Still," he thought, "it is of no use my being tired. I must get on ; or, at all events, until I feel that I am quite knocked up, I ought to try and reach London to-night."

This brave resolution gave way, however, when he arrived at the Old Kent Road, and saw what appeared in the semi-darkness to be two endless lines of houses, with a few shops sprinkled among them, poorly illuminated by tallow candles or train-oil lamps.

He had observed a notice upon a small public-house, which he left behind him shortly after entering upon this new tract of brick and mortar, that "Good beds" were obtainable within, and he began to regret not having ventured in at once and secured one of those necessary articles.

Just as he was debating with himself whether he should turn back to the little tavern—feeling conscious that he could not go on much further—another similar establishment of the same humble appearance, and having in its window an announcement of a like character, appeared upon the opposite side of the way.

Without more ado he crossed over, and entering the open door of the "Sparrow and Post," descended two steps to the level of the flooring.

Nó one was at the bar when Guy entered the place, although the sounds of men's voices, joining with doleful cadence in a chorus of "fol de rol, de rol," etc., to a song, chanted by another voice in an equally melancholy strain, proved that the house was not wanting in jovial company.

A middle-aged woman in black, who had been sitting alone in the bar-parlour, came forward as Guy went in, for the purpose of serving him. She was very stout in person, and had a broad, rosy, comely-looking face, which might, at an earlier period, have even advanced pretensions to prettiness, although it had become somewhat hard and coarse with increasing years.

She had a pleasant smile upon her features as she presented herself; but at sight of Guy, from some cause which the lad could not divine, she changed colour, and uttered a faint exclamation, while her round, blue eyes filled with tears.

Guy stopped short in the middle of his inquiry about a supper and bed, on observing this evidence of emotion, and did not again speak until the landlady, recovering herself, wiped her eye-lids with the corner of her white apron, and asked, looking at him meanwhile with great attention, to what she could serve him.

"I have walked a long way," answered Guy, "and am ready to drop, I am so fagged. Could you let me have a cup of tea,—or a little bread and cheese? and could you, too, let me have a bed?"

"Yes, my boy, certainly," replied the woman eagerly (her name, as Guy had read upon the door-post, was Warkup). "It's rather late for tea, but there's a little milk left, and it'll refresh you more than anything else I dare say. Here, come round into my room. There's a musical party in the parlour, and it's full of smoke; you'll be more comfortable here."

Guy thanked her warmly for the invitation, which he was not slow to accept; and sat himself down in a chair that was set for him beside the stove, which was adorned with a marvellous ornament, composed of ringlets of deal-wood, falling from a rosette—not unlike the back of a wooden head—into the brass-fender below.

Mrs Warkup, notwithstanding the over-plumpness of her figure, had not lost her activity; for she bustled about the little bar, to and from a cupboard in the corner, until the small, round mahogany table was quite crowded with bread, butter, tea-tray, china, and some pots of preserves, which seemed trying to hustle each other over the edge of the board.

Guy at first had seen these preparations with considerable satisfaction; but when he beheld such evidence of quite a *sumptuous* meal in preparation, he began to think of his own small means, and the necessity of husbanding them.

This feeling at length induced him—as Mrs Warkup, having got everything in readiness, sat

down in a high-backed arm-chair, on the other side of the grate—to lean towards her, and say, in a quiet tone,—

“It’s very kind of you to take all this trouble, but I think it right to tell you, that I’m not rich, and that the little I have I must make last me for I don’t know how long.”

Mrs Warkup looked him full in the face, while her moist, blue eyes shot forth beams of kindness. Then, after a few moments, she said,—

“I dare say, my dear, we shan’t quarrel about that. At all events *I* shan’t. But here comes the tea,” she added, as if willing to change the subject, and taking the tea-pot from an old woman who brought it in. “Draw up to the table, and I’ll have a cup with you, just for company’s sake.”

“That’s right,” answered Guy, put completely at his ease, much more even by the landlady’s looks than by her words,—“that’s right; but I warn you, I’ve got a famous appetite.”

Mrs Warkup nodded and smiled, evidently delighted to hear it; and while she poured out tea for both, observed him make an attack upon the viands with a look of thorough contentment.

“And so,” she said, after a few moments’ silence, while she stirred her tea perseveringly, and occasionally sipped it with a spoon,—“and so you are very tired, eh? Have you come far to-day?”

“A long way,” answered Guy, with his mouth full. “I have walked from Gravesend since the morning.”

"From Gravesend!" exclaimed Mrs Warkup,—and there she paused, as if the news had taken away her breath,—“why, God bless the boy, its thirty miles if it's one!”

“It seemed to me like three hundred,” observed Guy, putting a thick layer of currant and raspberry jam on an equally substantial under stratum of bread; “indeed, to tell the truth, I sometimes thought the roads had no ends to them, they were so long.”

“I dare say,—I dare say,” said Mrs Warkup in an absent way, and then inquired, as she looked across the table into Guy's face, “and your mother, —what did she say at your coming so far, alone?”

A slight shadow passed over the lad's features, as the question brought back to him the memory of home; but after a slight pause he answered:

“My mother was quite willing to part with me, for she knew how much I wished to come up to London.”

As Guy finished speaking, a man in a labouring dress came to the bar, and putting a jug upon the counter, asked for “a pint and a half of porter.”

When he was served, having been meanwhile regarding Guy, he remarked as he went out at the door:

“So I see, Mrs Warkup, you've got your son home again.”

The landlady turned pale, but made no answer.

Guy, who heard the remark, but did not observe

the effect it had produced, said, as she resumed her seat:

“Then you have a son too? Is he older than I?”

The tears again welled up to the landlady's blue eyes, and more than once rolled over on to her cheek. But she wiped them away, as before, with the corner of her apron, and after a few moments said:

“I *had* a son, my dear, and he was my only child, —left out of seven. They are all gone now,—all. But God's will be done!”

She covered up her face as she spoke, and rocked herself to and fro in her chair, as if seeking to quiet the grief which the man's remark and Guy's question had brought forth, as a nurse would appease a fractious child.

The lad felt vexed that he had been any way instrumental in exciting the grief which he was conscious such losses must inflict upon the sufferers; but this little scene likewise explained to him how it was that the landlady had treated him so kindly from the moment of his entrance. He reminded her of her own son.

He was soon afterwards confirmed in this opinion by Mrs Warkup herself, who, in a broken kind of way, informed him that this son, who indeed had, in feature, person, and general manner, borne a strong resemblance to himself, left her about a twelvemonth before to go to sea, greatly against her inclination. She had not apprenticed him, as he wished, being

resolved that he should make a first voyage on trial, fervently hoping that he would alter his mind by the time he returned. But, alas! he was never destined to come back. The ship sprang a leak at the entrance of the Channel on her homeward voyage, and the water gained so rapidly on the vessel, that the pumps did not suffice to keep it under. The crew took to the boats, two of which barely served to hold them; while the captain, his wife, five passengers, and the landlady's son, got into the gig. The former reached the Scilly Isles in safety, but neither the gig nor any one of its hapless occupants had ever since been heard of. This had occurred at the fall of the previous year, about eight months prior to the commencement of our story; and, filled as was the landlady's mind with thoughts of her son, it may well be believed that the appearance of Guy thus late and travel-worn, bearing in his looks a resemblance, which the mother's sympathies made stronger than it was, should awaken in her breast the kindest feelings towards him.

She had scarce finished her sad story than the noisy party, miscalled "musical," issued from the parlour amid an atmosphere of their own, compounded of the steam from reeking glasses of rum and water, and of smoke from the best "shag;" and having, with much noise and clatter, and loud talking and louder laughter, severally rolled or shuffled into the street, the door was closed and bolted for the night.

Not even Guy's good appetite could summon itself in sufficient strength to play a second part in the supper soon after put upon the table. Still, he sat down to it, and did his best to keep his eyes open whilst it was in progress, a matter of greater difficulty than he had ever before experienced. Mrs Warkup readily perceived that rest and sleep were what the lad most needed, but she did not let him go until she could herself light him to his little chamber.

"This was *his* room," she said, as she placed the candle upon a small chest of drawers, and glanced her eye round it.

Guy looked round too, and saw that everything in the room, though of the simplest kind, was scrupulously neat and clean, the boards, where uncovered by the strips of carpet, being as white as scrubbing-brush and soap could make them.

"It was here," resumed the landlady, "that he slept last before he went to sea, poor, dear fellow! His bed was cold enough afterwards."

This thought quite overcame the bereaved mother, and she sat down on a chair, while a sob or two, which convulsed her whole frame, escaped her.

Guy wanted words to console her, but his action expressed the sympathy he felt, for he sat down on the edge of the bed near her, and putting his hand upon her shoulder, exclaimed, "Don't—oh! pray, don't."

The sweetness of the voice, the kindly soul breath-

ing through his eyes, struck the poor woman so forcibly as she raised her head and looked into his face, that with an irresistible impulse, and much, indeed, to Guy's astonishment, she fairly hugged him in her arms.

"There, God bless you, my dear!" she said as she set him free. "I hope you will be able to sleep well; and mind, as you're so tired, don't hurry up in the morning. Good night, good night."

Guy gravely undressed, and as gravely put out his light and got into bed. With equal gravity he began thinking over the events of the day, which he intended taking in the order wherein they had occurred; but long before he had even reached the second in point of rank, sleep had taken possession of his senses and hurried him off elsewhere.

CHAPTER XI.

THE WOUNDED HEEL—MRS WARKUP'S LOGIC—GUY'S
RESOLVES—THE PROPOSAL—SUNDAY.

AMONG the various resolves which Guy had made the day before, was one to get up early, and, as soon as he had despatched his breakfast, perform the remainder of his journey to the great city, and present his letter of introduction.

Two powerful reasons prevented this good intention being carried into effect.

But the first would alone have interfered with its realization; for his bed was so comfortable, and the lad was so tired, that it was nearly ten o'clock before he awoke.

And when he did awake, and sprang out of bed to dress, he discovered one of his heels to be so blistered with his unusual amount of walking, that he could not put his foot to the ground without pain; and as to drawing on his boot, he was forced to give that up for the present as an impossibility.

Having finished dressing, he sat down and made another desperate attempt to squeeze his injured foot into its necessary protection; but was again

compelled, after much needless pain, to pull it out and deposit it on the carpet.

It was when sitting, in rather a disconsolate mood, looking first at his inflamed heel and then at the refractory boot, that a tap was heard at the door, and Mrs Warkup—a little out of breath through coming up the stairs—walked in, and saluted him with,

“Good morning, my dear”—this was as soon as she could speak freely; “I hope you have had a good night’s rest. I know you have had a *sound* one; for I have been into your room more than once, and found you always fast asleep.”

“Thank you, ma’am,” said Guy; “I’ve slept famously. But, unluckily, I’ve walked a blister on my heel, and I can’t put on my boot.”

“Oh, I’m sorry for that. You must rest it. But never mind the boot; Mary shall bring you up a pair of slippers.”

“But how am I to walk, ma’am, if I can’t put on my boot?” inquired Guy.

“Why, you mustn’t walk at all till it’s better.”

“But I want to get to London, ma’am,” said Guy. “I’ve got a letter for a gentleman there, who, I hope, will give me something to do, or at least help me to find some work; and how can I go to him in a slipper?”

“Of course,” said Mrs Warkup, “you mustn’t think of it; and, more than that, you mustn’t think of trying to put on your boot. You might gall your

heel so that it would lay you up for a month. Besides, my dear, you wouldn't be able to do much to-day ; for Saturday is a very busy day with business gentlemen, and perhaps he wouldn't have time to speak to you. And it's raining cats and dogs, too ! the heaviest shower we have had this summer. So make up your mind to stop in-doors, and get a long rest ; and on Monday somebody shall show you the way to where you want to go. But come down now and have some breakfast ; I've been waiting for you to have mine ; and the bacon will be dried up to a cinder. Here, Mary !"—this was cried over the banisters—"bring me up that pair of slippers out of my cupboard ; the leather ones, you know !"

The slippers were brought ; and as the landlady's logic was of that practical and sweeping character which admits but of scant reply, our young friend did not attempt to make any ; but, thrusting his feet into the capacious shoes, followed his conductress down the stairs to the same little bar-parlour where he had tea'd and supped the night before.

The preparations for breakfast were on the same scale of homely abundance as the meal of which he had partaken there on his arrival ; and as the business of the little establishment rarely began to be brisk before twelve o'clock, Mrs Warkup and Guy were enabled to enjoy it without much interruption.

The quiet afforded the good landlady also an opportunity of learning many particulars of Guy's former life ; and, if it were possible to judge from

the closeness of her inquiries, the subject was one which greatly interested her.

The lad was by nature somewhat reserved ; and he had set out upon this "journey of life" with a resolution to be chary of unbosoming himself to strangers, or even talking much with them about his own affairs.

But he made a strong exception to this rule in the case of Mrs Warkup ; partly on account of the great kindness the landlady had shown towards him from the first, and more because of a certain winning manner which she possessed of drawing out any information that she was desirous of obtaining.

Before breakfast, therefore, was over, she had elicited from Guy a tolerably full account of his troubles and trials ; and knew by name, and had obtained a pretty complete description of the characters and appearance of every member of his family.

On one point only Guy was scrupulously silent. When alluding to the disagreement which led to his leaving home, he never so much as hinted at the father's unhappy vice ; but rather allowed it to be inferred that his own dreamy and erratic habits, which looked so much like *idleness*, were the main cause of his becoming a wanderer.

"But that is all over now," said Guy ; "I am determined to lose no more time. I mean to show them that I don't intend *dreaming*, as they call it, any longer, but am resolved to work with my eyes open."

"Quite right, my boy!" said Mrs Warkup approvingly. "Quite right. There is nothing in this world like work. It keeps the mind from hatching mischief, which it's very apt to do; and it prevents the heart, too, from brooding over its sorrows and wrongs, which it's very ready to do also."

Here the landlady paused, while her lips trembled somewhat. Brightening up, however, a moment afterwards, she said,

"Now, Guy—for I mean to call you Guy, though I don't much like the name, for you're not at all like a Guy, you know—suppose the gentleman you've got the letter for shouldn't want any one in his shop or his office, what do you intend to do then?"

"I mean to ask him to recommend me to his friends."

"And suppose, if he does recommend you, that his friends don't want anybody, what then?"

"Why," said the youth, "I'm told that tradesmen put up in their windows in London, as they do down in the country, that 'a willing lad is wanted within.' Well, when I see that, I shall go in and offer myself; and if it's necessary, I'll walk through every street in London till I get suited."

"And while you are doing this," persisted the landlady, "supposing you're a long time before you get settled, how do you mean to live?"

"Oh," said Guy, although he looked rather grave at this possibility, "I mean to take a cheap lodging somewhere about, and make the little money I've

got last me until something turns up. I can live on very little. I can indeed," added Guy, observing a kind of half smile upon the landlady's face, at the thought, probably, of the substantial meal he had just devoured; "for though I eat very heartily when I can get it, I can be contented with a crust of bread and a drink of water if there's nothing else."

There was a slight pause after Guy had done speaking, which was at length put an end to by the landlady.

"You mustn't think," she said, "that I've been asking you all these questions to tease you or dishearten you. God forbid! I wanted to see what you thought of doing, for I have somehow taken a great interest in you. Perhaps you've already found out why. If you have not, I may as well tell you at once that when you came in at that door last night you reminded me so much—of my poor lost boy—that at first I thought—poor dear—although he's been dead and cold so many months—he had come back home—to comfort me. Perhaps, who knows, *you*, who are so much like him, *may* have been sent for that purpose—you may have been sent to supply his place; for wasn't it strange that you should come all the way you did?—that you should have passed the 'Globe' and the 'Rising Sun' by the way, and come straight into my house? At all events, the thought makes me happy, and I don't mean to give it up. I wanted somebody to

love, and as you've been sent to me, you must let me love *you*. Now, won't you, dear?"

What could Guy answer to such an appeal?

He murmured out something, he knew not what; but his words seemed to give his hearer satisfaction, for she continued, half-crying, half-laughing,

"You must let me have my own way, then, Guy, and not contradict me. I promise you I won't stop you in your search after employment. Just the reverse—I will do all I can to assist you; but you must make this your home meanwhile. No, don't interrupt me. You've promised me, you know, to let me do as I like. How can it be a trouble to me? Isn't it more likely to be a pleasure? I've got more than I shall ever want, if I was to leave off business to-morrow, and now I haven't a relation on my side the house I can call my own. It isn't a very nice place, it's true, for a young gentleman to be stopping at, but you might have a worse, and the cheap lodging you speak of wouldn't be any better—indeed, it wouldn't. And it will be of great use to *you*, Master Guy, I can tell you, to have a home to come to, if it is a humble one, when you happen to be out of a situation—for such things do happen, after people get into them; and it is a pleasant thing, too, to have a place to visit where one's sure to find the crust you talk about, and a bit of cheese and a good glass of ale along with it, and what is more, a kind welcome to make it all go sweetly down. So, kiss me, dear, and say you'll do as I wish you, and,"—here

Mrs Warkup paused, and holding Guy by the shoulders, looked him full in the face—"you may call me 'Mother' if you like, and you're not ashamed to do so."

All this long speech was said with such evident feeling and earnestness, expressed much more in the tone and look than in the words, that Guy was deeply touched by it, and yielded, with little difficulty, to the offer thus generously made.

Before, however, he did so, he extracted from the worthy landlady a promise that she would in return make him useful as long as he remained with her and as far as his abilities extended, which she the more readily engaged to do as she saw it would make him more willingly fall in with her own views respecting him.

This little scene being over, much to Mrs Warkup's satisfaction, she left the room to attend to some domestic duties, having first supplied Guy with a sheet of paper to write home to his mother a history of his adventures thus far, and the pleasant halting-place where they had for the moment left off.

He dwelt at length upon the various incidents of his journey—his meeting with his uncle, his first night from home, his reception by Mr Tottles, his distant glimpse of London, and his present comfortable quarters at the "Sparrow and Post." He gave his mother a minute account of the kind words and expressed intentions of the worthy landlady, being convinced how deeply it would interest and console

her; and concluded by desiring her to forward his box by the carrier, as he could look upon his present abode as a temporary home.

To his father he wrote nothing, but he sent his dutiful regards, and he promised very shortly to write again a long letter to his dear sister Sophy, assuring her meanwhile that there was little chance, *as yet*, of his forgetting her or any of the others.

Guy finished his lengthy epistle just before twelve o'clock, the busiest hour of the little establishment.

It was fortunate; for, unused as he was to write amid the noise and bustle of business, he would otherwise have found a difficulty in abstracting his mind from the confusion about him and concentrating his attention upon what he was about.

The "Sparrow and Post" was much frequented by the labouring men of the neighbourhood,—and there were many at that time living in the courts and alleys close by.

Mrs Warkup carried on her business upon honest principles. Her beers and ales were served out to her customers as untouched and pure as when they left the brewers' yards. This fact was well known and just as well appreciated by the frequenters of her house, many of whom came from a distance in order to get "a drop of good beer."

Guy did not much relish their loud tones and rough manners; nor did he feel much prepossessed in favour of the business itself. But he had no opportunity of making a closer acquaintance with it

than he derived from peeping through the blind of the little bar-parlour window; for Mrs Warkup, either from a desire to spare his sore heel, or a wish to keep him out of the way, desired him to sit still and amuse himself with a book, supplying him for that purpose with the whole contents of her library shelf,—composed at that time of but three volumes! a bible, a prayer-book, and a ready reckoner!

Not feeling inclined at the moment for a dip into the light literature thus offered for his perusal, he amused himself with watching Mary, in her progress to and from the house and an outer scullery, as her figure appeared crossing the court, which was the sole territory visible from the window. It still pouring with rain, she had turned her dress over her head in lieu of an umbrella, and thrust her feet into pattens, which raised her at least six inches from the ground; and very comical she looked, with a liberal display of legs discernible beneath a short petticoat, her black stockings darned with various shades of cotton, from dingy blue to dusty grey; and a huge swollen pocket dangling from her side.

When Mary had ceased her perambulations, Guy peeped through the little blind into the bar, and observed the faces of the customers as they came in and out, or stood with their pewter measures before them, discussing their beer and all the local news together.

Or he would settle his chin in his hand, with his elbow resting on the arm of the chair,—his favour-

ite position,—and in spite of his assertion “to dream no more,” go on dreaming; alternating his fancies with a little reflection as to why those three lemons opposite should be suspended in little nets from hooks in the shelf,—as to what “Bitters” could be like,—and as to the sort of drinkable another liquor could be which went under the name of “Shrub,” both of which names he saw inscribed in gilt letters upon extraordinarily shaped bottles close by.

Busy as the day proved for Mrs Warkup, and long as it seemed to Guy, thus compelled to inactivity, it at length came to an end.

But they had no opportunity of further conversation, for even their meals were interrupted by the “dropping in” of customers, and the last did not leave till nearly midnight. Before that hour, however, had struck, Mrs Warkup had assumed maternal authority enough to recommend Guy to go to bed, advice which he discreetly followed, trusting by entire rest the quicker to cure his wounded heel, and enable him on the Monday to carry out his plans.

Another peculiarity of Mrs Warkup’s consisted in her closing her establishment entirely upon the Sunday.

She had adopted this plan since the news of her boy’s death, and had made a vow never to alter it. She shut her eyes resolutely to the stream of customers who passed her door on that day, and who distributed their favours between the “Globe” and

the "Rising Sun;" for she felt a conviction in her own mind that the money turned away was not lost to her, and had the satisfaction of giving her assistant, "Old Miles," and the pot-boy, a holiday.


It enabled the landlady herself, also, to go regularly to church, and have a quiet day afterwards, with leisure either to take a little walk in fine weather, or sit at home and meditate on the past.

A neighbour or two would occasionally drop in during the afternoon, and have a chat of an hour or so, and sometimes stop to tea. These, however, were rare treats, and they did not occur upon this particular Sunday.

To tell the truth, Mrs Warkup was rather pleased than otherwise that Guy and herself were alone.

They went to church in the morning, for St George's, in the Borough, was not far, and our young friend managed to put on his boot and walk the distance without injury to his heel. And, after dinner, they sat at the open window of Mrs Warkup's chamber, on the floor over the shop, whence they had a good view of the passers-by, and where they had a long talk over various matters, which helped to make them better known to each other.

And so the day passed, with considerable satisfaction to both, for Guy felt no dulness while talking of those at home; it seemed, as he spoke of his mother and Sophy, and told little anecdotes about Mary, and Kate, and Willy, that he was again among them all and would see them again on the morrow.



And Mrs Warkup, on her part, soothed her sorrows by recounting them, and, indeed, often forgot them altogether while listening to Guy's animated description of some event, or laughing at a clever knack he had of imitating the voice or peculiarity of any individual.

One thing delighted her beyond measure. Her eyesight being too weak to enable her to take pleasure in a book for more than a few minutes together, even with the aid of glasses, towards evening she asked Guy to read aloud a chapter or two of the New Testament.

Reading aloud was one of the things in which the youth excelled. At school he had been remarkable for the clearness of his enunciation and the agreeable pitch of his voice ; and as he possessed much intelligence, he always endeavoured to modulate it according to the subject before him.

The landlady gave her undivided attention to the sacred words conveyed to her in a style to which she was totally unaccustomed ; for neither of the curates at the church had ever thought it worth his while to deliver the lessons of the service in a tone different to the monotonous one of a street crier, and Mrs Warkup had had no opportunity of listening to better readers.

She looked, therefore, upon the performance of Guy—simple and natural as it was—as something very wonderful indeed, and felt more than before drawn towards the youth whom Providence—as she devoutly believed—had specially thrown in her way.

CHAPTER XII.

LONDON—OLD MILES—THE BOOKSELLER'S IN FLEET STREET—A WALK ABOUT TOWN—THE CONTRAST.

THE morning was not a bright one which was to witness Guy Rivers' first entry into London. It was, on the contrary, dull and heavy, with occasional showers of rain by way of only change.

But the wet was not sufficient to damp the lad's resolution to set out tolerably early for the address written on the back of his letter of introduction; nor could his sore foot prevail on him to defer it a day longer.

Mrs Warkup, true to her promise, said not a word to dissuade him from his purpose, although in her secret heart she could not wish him success; for she had learnt, even in the brief period they had been together, to like him well enough to fear to part with him.

Seeing him, however, determined, she commissioned "Old Miles" to accompany him to Mr Bindwell's, the stationer and bookseller of Fleet Street, in spite of Guy's earnest assertion that he would be able to find his way alone.

But he was not sorry, on plunging into the crowds which thronged the "Borough," to have the guidance of so experienced a pilot as "Old Miles;" besides that the man was very entertaining as a companion.

His appearance was somewhat remarkable, being very gaunt in person, with a face long and thin as his limbs; and just in the same way as those limbs showed an inclination to lag behind, when their owner intended to go forward, his cheeks fell back, and the scant hair on the hinder part of his head fell back, and his eyes seemed sinking further and still further back into his skull.

Old Miles' thread of life had been a chequered one,—with a great many knots in it. It had kinked a score of times, and threatened more than once to break altogether.

He had passed through many and strange scenes; he had lived half a dozen lives of many men; and from his fondness for dwelling constantly on the past, perhaps arose the peculiarly *backward* appearance we have noticed as distinguishing him.

"Where are all these people going to?" asked Guy, as he rejoined Miles after being separated from him a dozen times, in the course of half as many minutes, by the stream of passengers.

"They're going," answered Miles, sententiously, "where all the others come from."

"And where may that be?"

"Why, about their business, to be sure; their business or pleasure."

"Very little pleasure, I should think," said Guy, "to judge from their faces."

"Some people," answered Miles, "find their pleasure in their business, and some make a business of pleasure; so, how are you to tell from their faces which is which?"

Guy found no reply to this, and no opportunity of stating it if he had, for they were now at the foot of London Bridge—the very bridge which, some thirty years ago, was jostled out of its place by the present handsome structure.

Hitherto, the only thing which had interested the lad since leaving the "Sparrow and Post," was the activity of the streets; for there was nothing in the buildings to distinguish them from those of his native town; but, on his arrival upon the bridge, the grandeur and space of the vast City struck him with wonder and delight.

Miles drew him into one of the recesses of the bridge, which formed little quiet havens, so to speak, off the rush and turmoil of the current, wherein to take refuge and refit ere again encountering the perils of the way.

The old man supported him on the stone ridge at the angle, in order that he might have a good view of the broad running river; of the other bridges spanning the stream; of the warehouses, which jostled each other in their apparent eagerness to reach the water's edge; of the houses upon houses peering above them; of the steeples of various

churches rising again beyond the latter ; and of the noble edifice of Saint Paul's, placed grandly in the midst, with its beautifully-proportioned dome, within a stone's throw, as it were, of his standing-place.

After taking his fill of all these salient features of the prospect, Miles led the delighted boy under horses' heads, and between numerous-packed vehicles, across the road, in order that he might view the different scene presented by the lower portion of the river.

Guy beheld, with immense satisfaction, the tall structure of the Tower, and seriously inquired of Miles whether he had ever seen any one beheaded there ? With no less pleasure he observed the crowd of ships stretching far down the "pool." He watched with singular interest the constant passing to and fro of boats and wherries—some rowed, some under sail—bearing from shore to shore, or to and from the anchored vessels, scores of passengers, male and female ; and listened, as attentively as he could, to Miles' anecdotes of the accidents which had happened, and the deeds that were sometimes done in the dead of night upon the heaving river. These latter tales, indeed, were occasionally of so awful a character, that it was fortunate, perhaps, they were but imperfectly heard amid the constant burr and roar around them, or Guy might have fancied London to be a very sink of wickedness, and have hesitated to come over the bridge after night had fallen.

Having spent a good hour in viewing these different sights, they pursued their walk, and stopped in their progress up Fish Street Hill, to make their necks uncomfortable by gazing to the summit of the Monument.

Guy heard, with the astonishment felt by thousands before him, the silly tale of how the Roman Catholics had, in the reign of the second Charles, wilfully begun the great fire which left thousands houseless before its fearful work was over; and how this huge column, like the first pillar of a great Temple which was never destined to be finished, was raised to commemorate the event.

Miles had some difficulty to get Guy past the attractive shops, filled with curious and costly wares, which lined each side of the way as they passed up Gracechurch Street and along Cornhill and Cheap-side. It was in seeing the abundance of jewellery and merchandise of all kinds displayed in such profusion, and in the crowds of well-dressed people thronging the footways, and in the multitude of vehicles of every description rolling over the stones and making an incessant din, that the lad fully realized the fact that he was at length in London!

The sight of St Paul's, when he held on to the iron railings and gazed through them at its colossal and yet harmonious proportions, awakened his enthusiasm; and he was still more impressed with a sense of its grandeur when his companion informed

him that it cost quite a little fortune to be shown all its wonders.

"But is it right, Miles," inquired Guy, "to pay money to see over a church?"

"Well," answered Miles, hesitatingly, "I can't exactly say; but as the good clergymen charge it, I suppose it is; for they ought to know best."

More shops, more people, and more vehicles, in never-failing streams, having been passed by, they arrived at length in sight of Temple Bar, about which Guy had heard and read many strange and contradictory stories; but his attention was shortly drawn from it by Miles' exclamation of, "Here we are, Master Guy; this is the house!"

Guy saw they were standing before a modest looking shop, with a window full of books and articles of stationery, having the name of "John Bindwell," written in large blue letters on a marble ground, over the entrance.

The youth felt a slight trepidation come over him as he thus found himself at his journey's end; but, summoning resolution, he entered the shop at once, and inquired if Mr Bindwell was in.

"Yes, he is," said a lad, a year or two older than himself, who was employed in arranging some brown paper parcels on an upper shelf; "yes, but he's engaged."

"I'll wait till he's at leisure, then," said Guy, with a nod, an action which was approvingly repeated by Miles.

He had to wait some time, and amused himself meanwhile with minutely examining the rows of books standing neatly side by side on shelves, or with their backs upwards on a further counter, and at a vast number of handsomely bound ones, sheltered from the dust and damp in glazed cases occupying one whole side of the shop.

He had never beheld so many volumes before, for the largest library in his native town was quite an insignificant affair compared with this great city store.

After indulging in a lengthened reverie upon the delight of dipping into such a vast collection of learning, and reading the backs of as many volumes as he could see, a glazed door, from which had been issuing the sounds of voices for some time past, suddenly opened, and two gentlemen came out.

They were followed by a third, a short, stoutish man, with a very red beardless face, and very white hair, cut so short as to give a peculiar bullet appearance to his head, and who had a pair of gold spectacles low down upon his nose.

The lad who had answered Guy on his entrance, made a pantomimic sign to him that the white-headed, red-faced gentleman was Mr Bindwell; at which our young friend walked up to him, and taking off his cap, presented his letter, with the words,

"I have brought this, sir, from Mr Tottles, of Bexley."

"Who?" exclaimed the bookseller and stationer,

rather sharply, as Guy thought; but without waiting for an answer, he tore open the letter and rapidly ran his eye over the contents.

When he had done, he lowered his glasses to look at Guy over the brim, and muttered, "Hm!—Ha!—Hm!" then said, "So you are the lad referred to here, I suppose?" tapping the letter with his right hand, as he spoke.

"Yes, sir," answered Guy briskly; "and I should be very glad,—I do hope, sir, you will be able to give me something to do."

"Hm!—Ha!—Hm!" exclaimed Mr Bindwell again, as if involuntarily, while he looked at Guy a second time over his spectacles. After a pause, he inquired, "Do you know anybody in London? or rather, does anybody in London know you?"

"I am quite a stranger here, sir," answered Guy; and the only person who knows anything about me, —and she doesn't know much,—is the landlady of the house where I am stopping."

"Ha!—Hm!" said Mr Bindwell, drawing in his lips; then he added, "Well, give your address to my clerk," indicating that personage by a backward jerk of his round, white head, "and call on me again to-morrow, at ten."

With that, the bookseller turned upon his heel, and, without waiting for further parley, disappeared behind the glazed door.

Guy and Old Miles also took their departure, after the former had given his address, and were soon

again threading their way in and out the bustling crowd.

"Well, Miles," said Guy, as soon as they were able to have any talk together, "what do you think of Mr Bindwell?"

"Oh, he seems a sharp 'un, he does," answered Miles; "not a bad sort of a gentleman, I should say, but a bit of a tartar."

"Why do you think that, Miles?"

"Because of his head," said the old man in reply. "He must be a hot 'un, he must, to have his face burnt so red, and his hair so white,—just for all the world like a wood fire,—red hot underneath, and white ashes a top. He's a peppery one, he is, Master Guy, and no mistake."

"Peppery or not," said Guy, "I hope he'll give me or get me something to do. What do you think now? Has he any idea of employing me? Is it a good sign his asking for my address, and telling me to call to-morrow?"

"Yes," said Miles, confidently; "I think he does mean something serious. And I'll tell you another reason why I think so. When he turned round to go back into his room, he just gave a quiet nod to his clerk behind the counter; and his clerk, he just gave another quiet nod to him; and the two nods together, they meant 'he'll do!' and if it isn't so, and I'm not right,—why I'm a Dutchman; what do you say to that?"

Guy had not the slightest idea of saying anything

to it in the way of contradiction, or of bringing upon Miles' head the catastrophe, as the old man seemed to think it, of making him a "Dutchman;" besides, he was too pleased with the intelligence and confidence expressed in Miles' speech to think of gainsaying it. He therefore contented himself with observing, "Well, we must wait till to-morrow, and then we shall see;" and continued walking on without again alluding to the subject.

The reader may believe, however, that it was discussed in all its bearings, after dinner, at the "Sparrow and Post;" and many were the conjectures hazarded by Mrs Warkup as to what Mr Bindwell would say to him next day, and whether, if he gave him any employment, it would be in-doors or out.

Guy had been so little fatigued by his walk of the morning, that after dinner, he resolved to have another stroll,—this time alone,—in order that he might ruminate awhile upon his prospects of success. After sundry admonitions from his kind protectress "not to lose his way," and "to be very careful not to get run over," the youth put on his cap and walked out.

It was a different kind of walk to the one he was accustomed to take when at home on the half-holidays, or in the summer evenings after school hours.

There were no umbrageous trees to shield him from the sun, and raise his thoughts heavenwards by a contemplation of their grandeur. There were

no green fields spangled with buttercups or clover ; no winding stream with broken, flower-clad banks, up to which the young fish came in search of careless insects creeping too near the water's edge. There were no wooded slopes, no sweet-smelling picturesque hop-grounds, no distant line of soft blue hills, hinting at localities as charming as those from which they were beheld.

But in place of them there were muddy streets, lined with houses of dingy brick, displaying so little architecture, that whole rows of dwellings appeared but as a blank wall, with square apertures pierced therein for doors and windows. There were other houses, with as little pretensions to taste for distant prospect ; and there were whole acres of shop fronts for the display of goods,—the production and conveyance of which, to the places where they stood spread out, had cost treasures of human hopes, and lives, and perils, and fatigues, and adventures innumerable both by sea and land.

But the great interest, as Guy found before, of these London streets, lay in the contemplation of the ever active *Life* by which they were animated. Thousands of beings passed him by, or met him in his walk, each one of whom carried within him a heart to love or grieve, a brain to conceive, and a tongue to utter the kindest or the bitterest things. Each bore with him secrets which no other human beings would ever know. And each, although a mere atom of the crowd, had his place in a circle of

his own, and would leave a gap—one greater, another less—if he should fall out from it.

Every passion common to humanity was visible upon the faces of the multitude passing by,—if Guy had only held the clue possessed by Lavater, to decypher them. Every phase of society had its representatives in the streets, though the level of modern dress prevented any particular distinction being visible.

Their errands were as various as the features and expressions of their faces. Some were going to conclude bargains which would make or ruin them; some to perform acts of generosity and kindness. One might be bound upon an errand of self-sacrifice and duty; another upon a mission of entire selfishness or crime. Thousands were passing to and fro for objects of the merest business connected with their daily toil; others, but they were fewer, were bent solely upon amusement. Many were proceeding to eat dinners which they did not care for, and many more were sinking for want of a meal. And thus jostling each other, thus strangely contrasted must ever be the passing crowds which fill the streets of a great city.

In his old meditative way, Guy reflected upon these things, and arrived at something like such a conclusion. He longed, too, for the time when he also should tread these great highways with an object, and not, as at present, a mere purposeless observer.

His wanderings and musing fit had carried him so far, that he was compelled to make more than one inquiry for the Kent Road ere he could find his way back again, and he had, by returning in a different direction to the one he came, an opportunity of getting a still wider notion of the vast labyrinth of streets which helped to make the huge metropolis.

It was nearly six o'clock before he reached the "Sparrow and Post," and he found both Miles and Mrs Warkup at the door on the look-out for his return, as it was an hour beyond tea-time, and both had become anxious for his safety.

"How you have frightened me!" said Mrs Warkup, as she led him in by the arm, as if fearing that he would again stroll away from her.

"But why, dear mother?" asked Guy, making use of the term of endearment which he knew would be most pleasing to her. "I am not a child, to be run away with."

"You're not a child, my dear, it's true," said Mrs Warkup, "but I'm not so sure you couldn't be spirited away. You don't know this great city yet, or half its dangers. It wouldn't be the first time a lad had disappeared, if you unhappily had never come back. And for the last hour I've been so anxious about you. I couldn't stop in-doors, and Miles has been to the top of the road and the bottom of the road half-a-dozen times. And you with your bad foot, too, and I wanting to tell you something.

"Oh, tell me the something at once, please," said Guy, "and never mind the foot, for that's a great deal better."

"Well, tea is ready, and cold, for the matter of that, I should think," said Mrs Warkup. "I told Mary to put the tea-pot down by the fire in the kitchen. We'll have it in, and when you've had something to eat, I'll tell you what I've got to say."

Guy saw there was no help for it, so waited patiently until both had taken their first cup, and he had himself laid in a good stock of bread and butter.

When they had arrived at this point, the landlady leant towards him and said, in a kind of mysterious tone,

"If I was to tell you somebody had been down from that gentleman's you know, the bookseller's in Fleet Street, what would you say?"

"You don't mean that?" said Guy, suddenly stopping in the act of cutting another slice of bread; "you don't mean to say that somebody's been here already?"

"Yes, I do," said Mrs Warkup; "and more than that, he put all sorts of questions about you, some of which I had a little trouble to answer; but I did answer them—all."

"Well," observed Guy, "then Miles was right. There is something in it."

"Yes, I've no doubt of it," said Mrs Warkup, "though, like all those business men, he was so very

cautious that he didn't even give as much as a ghost of a promise."

"Oh, that would be famous," exclaimed Guy warmly, and quite carried away by the idea suddenly presented to his mind. "To get something to do, only something, so soon, which could let me feel that I was gaining my own living! What a delight to be able to write to my father, and say, 'You used ——.' " But there he stopped short, for this was a subject about which he chose only to commune with his own heart; and not even to the landlady, who had been so kind to him, would he refer too particularly to his father. He therefore finished his phrase abruptly with, "Yes, that would be capital!"

"What! to leave me, Guy, so soon?" asked Mrs Warkup, with tears in her eyes.

"Oh, no, not that—not that, dear, dear mother. No, not to leave *you*, but to be earning my bread with my own hands. I'm sure it must be sweeter, though it can't be better, and won't, perhaps, be so good as this. But, you know, it's what I've come away from home for, to try and get my own living and learn to be a man. So you mustn't feel surprised if I'm pleased at the idea of doing it. But what did the gentleman say?"

"Why," answered Mrs Warkup, who had recovered again under the influence of Guy's earnest manner, "he asked if you lived here, and if it was true that I knew you; and he asked, too, who you were, and all about your parents. Well, from what you've

told me I was able to give him a pretty good account of you, which I did, Master Guy, though I felt that while I was doing it I was only helping you to leave me. And though the gentleman, as I said before, didn't make anything like a promise, I feel sure in my own mind—I say, in my own mind—that you'll get a situation."

"But what makes you *so sure* of it in your own mind?" inquired Guy.

"Because, my dear, in this world it's always so. As I didn't much care about your getting it—you see I tell you the truth—because I don't want to part with you yet, you're sure to have it. Now, if I had wanted very much, you know, to get rid of you, and was doing all I could to try and get you away, I might try and try for everlasting, and I shouldn't succeed. It is such a perverse world."

"Yes, mother," said Guy, "perhaps you're right." But added slyly, "Though it can't be a perverse world, you know, for *everybody*, else no one would ever get what he wanted."

"Ah, well," observed Mrs Warkup, with a sigh, without further noticing Guy's remark, "we shall see; and, anyhow, I suppose it's all for the best."

And in chat of this kind, with the occasional interruptions of business, the evening passed away, and night came.

CHAPTER XIII.

MR BINDWELL—THE APPROVAL—A MISHAP—NEWS
FROM HOME.

IUNCTUAL to the appointed hour, Guy Rivers at ten o'clock entered the shop of Mr Bindwell, bookseller and stationer of Fleet Street.

Mr Bindwell being at that time alone in the office, the youth was directed into it at once by the lad who had spoken to him the previous morning, and who eyed him somewhat superciliously as Guy, cap in hand, made his way to the glazed door.

The youth entered, in obedience to an abrupt "Come in," given in reply to his modest tap, and on his doing so, found himself in front of the red face and white hair, and intently stared at by a pair of grey eyes, which glistened over the brim of the gold spectacles.

Mr Bindwell was seated on a high stool at a mahogany desk nearly black with age, and having its level top quite encrusted with the drops of ink which had dried upon each other, apparently for years, in successive layers.

Sundry office books were placed on dingy brass bars, screwed into the desk itself and raised about

two feet above it ; files of papers of various kinds were hanging from different parts of this apparatus ; and the walls were so covered with a tapestry of notices, placards, bills, tables, and what not, that it was difficult to decide, at a first glance, whether they had been painted, papered, or left standing in their original plaster.

The whole of this strange, and certainly untidy decoration, was coated with dust to a considerable thickness. If the matter had been studied, the curious inquirer might have guessed, from the degree and intensity of the dirt, the number of years each separate bill or paper had held its place ; for some were of the densest hue ; others presented a less dark and grimy appearance ; while a few were comparatively clean, as though they had been raised but recently to their present elevation. Among the latter, stood prominently out the "Stationers' Almanack," which, being only half-a-year or so old, looked singularly out of place, with its nearly white surface, and steel engraving of some public ceremony at the top.

There was room for three other persons at the desk where Mr Bindwell sat, but, as before observed, he was just then quite alone.

"So ;" he said, after looking intently at Guy for a good minute, without speaking, "you are punctual to your time. That's good. What can you do ?"

This question was put so abruptly after the former remark, that Guy, at the moment, was puzzled to

answer it. Recovering himself, however, as fast as he could, he said that he could write, and cypher, and


"Can you write a decent hand?" interrupted Mr Bindwell, who immediately afterwards added, "Here! take this sheet of paper; sit down on the stool opposite, and copy me out that Invoice."

Guy took the sheet of paper and the other written document which Mr Bindwell had called an "Invoice;"—he did his best to remember the name, and secretly wrote it down so as not to forget it;—then seating himself where he was directed, he applied his whole attention to the making a fair and proper copy.

Before he had done it, the clerk, Mr Ruggles by name, and who was the person who had waited on Mrs Warkup the evening before, came in.

After making some remark to his principal he sat down beside Guy, and gave him a quiet little nod of recognition, in reply to a respectful one of the former. He evidently thought well of the youth's performance, for his face bore a look of approval, as he passed it over, when done, for Mr Bindwell's inspection.

That gentleman, having cast his eye over it, observed to Mr Ruggles aloud, and with as much indifference as if Guy were out of hearing: "The boy won't write a bad hand by and by, though it's stiff and formal enough now." Then turning round to our young friend, he said, "Can you spell, my lad, correctly?"



"I think so, sir," answered Guy. "When I was at school, I used to have a good place in the class."

"Hm! ha! hm!" remarked Mr Bindwell, which speech, though unintelligible to the youth, evidently meant a good deal.

After a pause, during which the bookseller and his clerk looked at each other, and then at Guy, whose heart meanwhile went pit-a-pat, with a degree of force that was perfectly audible to himself, for he felt that he was on the verge of his fate, Mr Bindwell said :

"I think, Ruggles, we may take him on trial?"

"Yes, sir," answered the clerk, with an affirmative kind of nod, "I think so."

"So be it then," said the bookseller, who directly afterwards added, turning to Guy : "You may come here on . . . say Thursday morning at ten o'clock. Bring your things with you. And we'll give you a month's trial. If you suit, we'll talk about the salary we can allow you to start with. Meanwhile you'll have your board and lodging free, and an opportunity, if you're sharp, of learning something of business. Good morning."

"Good morning, sir," said Guy, with a face which, from the excitement he felt, almost matched in redness that of Mr Bindwell himself; "good morning, sir."

Whereupon, he took up his cap and backed out of the office with a bow.

There were no customers in the shop as the youth

made towards the street door. A man was engaged dusting some books in a further corner, and the lad, of whom mention has before been made, was on a ladder, reaching down a paper parcel.

"I say," he called out to Guy, in a loud whisper.

"Do you want me?" asked the latter, stopping.

"Are you to be one of us, old chap?" inquired the lad, crouching down upon the ladder so as to make his question just sufficiently loud to reach the ear of the youth for whom it was intended, and not be heard in the office.

"Yes," answered Guy with a smile and a nod.

"When?" demanded the other.

"On Thursday," said Guy.

"Don't forget, you'll have to pay for your freedom, my buck," returned the other with a grin, which gave to his countenance anything but a pleasant expression.

Guy, however, in his then feeling of mind, little heeded it. He stepped out upon the pavement and into the bustling street with a feeling of elation that he had never before experienced. He felt, as he made his way through the ever-rushing streams of people, that he had *now* an object; that he was no longer to be a mere looker-on in the game of life that he saw playing around him, but that he too, was about to become a sharer, and have a stake in the world's lottery.

"Whether I make a figure or not in my place," he reflected (as if, poor boy, the situation on which



GUY'S MISHAP.



he was about to enter were one of a character whereon the eyes of the country would be fixed), "it will at least prove to those at home that I have within me the power to gain my own living. My father, perhaps, will not look upon me as quite so worthless as he has chosen to call me. I may perhaps succeed,—who knows? and succeed so well, that after a year or two, I may be made chief clerk. I wonder whether Mr Bindwell has a daughter; and if he has, whether she's pretty! I have read of such things as poor lads coming up to London, and getting into places—not a bit better than mine, whatever that may be—and becoming their master's partners, and marrying their daughters and living happy ever after. And why shouldn't I?"

As he went on, at his old habit of dreaming,—in spite of getting rudely cuffed and spoken to by sundry individuals among the undreaming crowd, against whom he ran in his abstraction,—as he thus went on, absorbed in his reveries, his foot caught in something just by the curb, and he fell sprawling into the road amid a tray full of nuts and green apples, which he had unwittingly upset.

Their proprietor, an old Irishwoman, who was tranquilly smoking a short pipe on a stool just by, on seeing her stock in trade thus summarily dealt with, and sent rolling in every direction, flew at Guy like a tigress, and dealt him one or two hearty cuffs upon the ear before he could recover himself.

"Come, Missus, I say, that's enough," exclaimed

a dirtily dressed man, rescuing Guy from the old woman's clutches, and rubbing off the mud from his trowsers and waistcoat with the sleeve of his coat; "the young gemman didn't go for to do it on purpose; and your tray hadn't no business on the curb."

A dozen or so street boys and dirty people were round them in an instant, and Guy was happy to escape, with the aid of his champion, both from their vicinity and that of the enraged fruit-seller, who seemed quite disposed to inflict on him a more severe punishment, and did not fail as it was, to abuse him with the choicest names she could in her anger lay her tongue to.

Guy put his fingers into his waistcoat pocket in order to treat his chance friend to a glass of ale for his kindness, but found, to his dismay, that it as well as the other one was empty! a shilling and a sixpence—fortunately he had brought out with him no more—his pencil-case and penknife, all were gone; and when he thrust his hand into the pocket of his jacket to seek his handkerchief, he discovered that that was gone also.

"I am very sorry," said Guy, turning pale and looking up to make an apology to his companion for his inability to thank him otherwise than with words, but—to his astonishment—that individual was gone too; and he saw that he was quite alone at the entrance of a court, composed of mean-looking houses, where he had unconsciously been led by the polite thief.

"Are you looking for anybody, my dear?" inquired a man in a shabby-genteel suit of black, with black hair, black eyes, a yellowish face, and a nose so hooked that it gave him the appearance of a large kind of parrot.

"Why, I've lost my way," answered Guy; "perhaps you will be kind enough to direct me to it."

"Certainly, my dear, certainly," said the man; "just step up into my house for an instant, and I'll walk with you,—it's only two doors down."

"Oh, no, thank you," said Guy, hurriedly, who luckily remembered Mrs Warkup's admonitions of the evening before about the perils of London, and who was far from being prepossessed either with the appearance of the place or the hook-nosed stranger. "I won't trouble you; I dare say I shall find it."

"But your clothes are all dirty," argued the stranger, taking hold of Guy's jacket, the texture of the cloth of which he was evidently examining; "come up, only for a minute, my dear, and let me brush you."

"No, thank you," said Guy again, and this time decisively, while, with a dexterous twitch,—he had acquired the knack at school,—he rescued his jacket from the man's clutches, "I'd rather not."

Saying which, he got out of the court with two or three hasty strides, and, turning the corner, took sharply to his heels in the direction he believed he had come, preferring even to encounter a second

attack from the old Irishwoman in the public street, than meet unknown dangers in that narrow and forbidding court.

He was happy to find himself, after a few minutes' hard running, once more in the bustle of Fleet Street, at no great distance from the spot where he must have left it with his officious champion; for he could see the angry fruit-seller again seated on her stool, having apparently gathered up and re-arranged upon her stall the stock of indigestible "dainties," which he had accidentally upset.

The incidents just related quite scared away his dreams, however, for that day, and it was in a much more sober and "wide-awake" mood that he retraced his steps to his temporary home.

He was so ashamed of the silly way in which he had allowed himself to be robbed, and of the accident which led to the event, that but for his muddled clothes he would have been perfectly silent on the subject.

But his landlady's quick eye detected that something was wrong at once, and Guy, after parrying one or two of her questions, made a "clean breast" of it, and minutely detailed the whole affair.

She would probably have dwelt even longer upon the necessity of his being very careful in future, and have given him much more wholesome advice of the same kind, but that the further news he had brought of his engagement at the bookseller's drove everything else for the time out of her head.

"I said so," she exclaimed, after hearing what had passed at Mr Bindwell's, and seeming by her tone to lose the sharpness of the pang which the idea of Guy's leaving her had occasioned in the balm to her vanity that her prediction was correct. "I told you so! I was sure when that Mr What's-his-name came down yesterday he meant something; and I was sure, too, because, as I said before, I didn't want to part with you. It isn't, my child, that I'm sorry you've got an engagement, because I know how much you wish it; I'm only sorry for myself, a selfish old woman that I am. However, as I said before, it's all for the best, and we mustn't grumble. Besides, it won't be so very far off, and I dare say they'll let you come and see me, at least on Sundays, so that I shan't lose you altogether. So Thursday's the day? Well, by that time I suppose your box will be up from home, and Miles shall take it for you in a truck; for I should like you, my dear, to go respectable, you know. And I hope, Guy, when you go to your place, you won't be getting into mischief as you've done to-day, spoiling your clothes and losing your things. When I go up stairs I'll get you a clean handkerchief. Which was the one you lost? The pretty little white one you had in your room, and which I suppose was your sister's? Oh, not that one? Well, I'm glad of it, for that's a very nice cambric one, only not quite fit for a boy."

And thus Mrs Warkup ran on, and might have done so for a while longer, but that an importunate

customer came in, and would insist upon being instantly served.

Guy found the next day or so pass somewhat slowly, for, with the usual impatience of youth, the time which was to intervene before the realisation of his wishes appeared to him tedious and useless.

But the afternoon of Wednesday brought him great occupation and thought, for the Maidstone carrier, in passing the "Sparrow and Post," left at the door the expected trunk from home.

With what eagerness was it not unpacked, with what delight did he not lay his hand upon those things which had last been pressed by the hands of those he loved! As he knelt down before its open lid, and raised successively the smoothly-arranged linen and clothes, the hot tears dropped heavy and fast from his eye-lids; and the images of those at home—his patient, tender mother, his loving sisters, his little brother, his father, too, in former kindlier days—rose up before him with a vividness which quite overcame him, and he was forced to bury his head violently against the coverlet of his bed, near which he was at the moment placed, to suppress the hysteric sobs which were ready to escape him.

Having a little recovered this first emotion, he was able to appreciate more sensibly the thoughtful kindness which had presided at the packing of his trunk.

Not only did it contain everything that he possessed in the way of clothing, but Guy observed

many articles that were quite new, and the purchasing of which must, he was sure, have caused his mother, with her scanty means, no little trouble.

But besides these, the bottom of the box was lined with all his books—the books he so much treasured, for almost each had been a gift; and as he opened his favourite one—the “Life of Franklin, written by himself”—quite a little shower of letters came tumbling out of it, which he eagerly caught up and examined.

Yes, all had written to him, even Willy, who in a large, round hand, “hoped that he was well”—all except his father; but he could not expect that *he* would do so, though the absence of his well-known characters was painful to him.

With this exception, each member of the family had written something. They had employed the Sunday afternoon, as Sophy explained to him, in this good work. They had been to church in the morning, and had united their prayers for his health and success; and after their dinner, the father being out, they had sat down to tell him, with their pens, how much they loved him, how delighted they had been to hear of his progress thus far, how warmly they hoped he would be fortunate and happy, and how bright would be the day that should see them again united.

His mother's letter was a reflection of her own character, for it was tender, sensible, and anxious, yet not wanting in firmness, while it was strong in

its sense of duty. She urged upon him the necessity of walking stoutly in the fear of God and in the path of honesty, to be ashamed of nothing which was upright and true, and never to allow his sense of right to be turned aside by the laugh of the unthinking or the sneer of the worldly-minded. A few words of grateful thanks and regards, by way of a message to Mrs Warkup, at the end of the letter, brought tears into the eyes of that worthy woman, when Guy, in the evening, read them over to her.

And how swiftly that evening sped by in comparison with the two others which had preceded it! The hours seemed by some curious process to have become only half, nay, a quarter their usual length; and Guy found himself, when it struck eleven, expressing an opinion that he was sure it could only be nine o'clock, and that Miles must be in a wonderful hurry to be wanting to shut up so early.

How false would be our measurements of time if they were to be taken by human sensations!

CHAPTER XIV.

PUNCTUALITY—THE PORTER AND THE APPRENTICE— GUY'S FIRST ENTRY INTO BUSINESS.

IF Guy Rivers was true to his time on the former occasion when paying his visit to Mr Bindwell, the reader may be sure that he was not behindhand now, when he was about to become a member of the establishment. Nay, so desirous was he of retaining the character for punctuality to which he fancied the bookseller's praise entitled him, that he started off from Miles within a couple of hundred yards of the shop, because he heard an impatient neighbouring clock commence the chimes of the hour a minute or two before it had indeed any right to do so.

Miles, who was perspiring with the heat of the weather, and the exertion consequent upon wheeling Guy's trunk all the way from the Kent Road, could not forbear smiling at the youth's ardour, and ruminating, in his own mind, about how long it was to last.

"You see we're in good time, Master Guy," he said, as he came up to the door at which our young friend was standing,—for Mr Bindwell and his clerk

were engaged in the office with a country customer, and the porter only was there when Guy went in.

"Oh, yes; quite in time," answered Guy—"only, you know, I didn't like to be late. Our schoolmaster used to be very strict with us about time, and he got me, I suppose, into the way."

"And a very good way, too," said Miles, lifting the box out of his truck, and carrying it into the shop. "Only, when you get as old as me," he continued, taking off his battered hat, and wiping his forehead with his apron, "you won't, perhaps, be running to meet it as you do now, but will be after letting it catch up to you. Is there anything else I can be after doing for you, Master Guy?"

"No, thank you," said Guy; "here I am, you know, now, and I must wait myself for orders. So good-bye, Miles. My love at home, and I hope to see you soon."

"Good-bye to you, young gen'leman, and God bless you!" exclaimed the old man; murmuring to himself, as he turned upon his heel, "It was in this very truck, and about this time in the morning, I wheeled the chest of my missus' son down to the wharf when he started for *his* place, poor fellow! I hope this youngster 'll find a pleasanter berth of it than he did."

And with his hat stuck on the hinder part of his head, and everything about him as usual streaming backwards, old Miles, with a more serious face than usual, rattled his truck homewards.

"What shall I do with my box?" asked Guy of the porter, who was only known by the name of Tom.

"You must wait till master comes out," answered the man, rather gruffly, and who, as he turned round, presented to the youth's gaze the unmistakable remains of a black eye.

His general appearance, Guy thought, was rather pugnacious than otherwise. On the top of a pair of brawny shoulders, and sunk a little between them, was a massive hairy throat, supporting a round head, with low forehead, high cheek-bones, a nose flat almost as a negro's, and a heavy jaw, displaying, when his mouth was open, the want of two front teeth, which somehow made one instantly think had disappeared in a pugilistic encounter.

The aspect of this man's face was so little inviting, that Guy asked him no more questions, but quietly sat down on his box to wait till Mr Bindwell should be disengaged.

His patience was not destined to be put to a long trial, for that gentleman and his customer shortly came out, and went talking to the street door; and as the latter took his leave, the lad, whom Guy had hitherto seen, also came in, having returned from some errand.

"So, you are here all right, eh!" said the bookseller, observing Guy. "Is that your box? Brand will help you up with it, and show you your room. When you come down, go into the office to Mr Ruggles, who'll set you to work."

Thus speaking, Mr Bindwell walked out.

"Come along, old chap," said the lad, to whom the name of Brand belonged; "you have to share my room, as the last fellow did, before he got spoony, and went into the country to die."

With this consolatory mention of Guy's predecessor, the lad caught hold of one of the handles of Guy's trunk, and together they made towards a door, and up a flight of lead-covered stairs, which were behind it.

They were very narrow and steep, and it was with some difficulty the box could be persuaded to go up them.

"Don't make such a row," said the lad, after he had himself bumped the unyielding trunk many more times than Guy against the wainscoat and edges of the stairs.

Guy at that time answered nothing, but he resolved in his own mind, that if this young fellow intended to assume towards him an air of superiority, he would very soon find out his mistake.

The distance up appeared almost interminable, the more especially, as there were, so to speak, no special "landings" indicating the various floors of the house; this flight of stairs had evidently been an after thought, erected for convenience, and not contemplated by the original architect.

Long as the ascent was, it came to an end, and landed them at the top of the house, where a door on the right and another on the left became visible on their reaching the uppermost stair.

"This is ours!" exclaimed Brand, walking towards the one on the left; "and that one opposite is Tom's."

So speaking, he opened the door, which gave entrance to a largish room, with a lean-to roof, but sufficiently lofty, having two windows, barred, looking on to a parapet, and an oblong bit of sky.

Both windows were open, and from the roar of vehicles that came rushing into the chamber, it was evidently situated in front of the house.

Guy greatly feared, as he came up the stairs, that he would have to occupy the same bed as his new companion, an anticipation which rather damped the pleasure he felt at thus entering upon a life of independence. But a rapid glance round the room, through the open door, as they went in with the trunk, reassured him.

The apartment had been recently papered, and looked, therefore, clean; and it had a double set of furniture in it, truly, of the most ordinary kind, but meant to supply the decent wants of *two* persons. As each half of the room also had a window of its own, it had the appearance of two chambers from which the partition had been removed.

This sight restored Guy's spirits, and he thanked his companion for helping him up with his trunk, with more heartiness of tone than he could otherwise have used. The other, however, seemed in no way disposed to any great interchange of cordiality, but, observing to Guy that "he had better look sharp

down," began changing his own coat preparatory to descending to work himself.

Guy made no remark in answer, but quietly descended the way he had come.

He found Mr. Ruggles, the clerk, in the office, who saluted him kindly as he went in.

He was a man whose years might lie between twenty-five and forty, so little was there in his face to indicate his precise age.

His pallid complexion hinted at ill health, which was farther confirmed by a short, dry cough. Having nothing to speak of in the way of whisker, he might, at a first glance, be esteemed even younger than the youngest of the ages mentioned, but for certain lines about the forehead and at the corner of the eyes, which rarely appear till after thirty. His manner was singularly quiet and uncommunicative; but there was no moroseness in his character, for he ever showed himself ready to perform little acts of kindness when applied to.

"That will be your place, Rivers," he said to Guy, pointing to a vacant stool next his own, "and there is a desk for you to keep your things in; the key is in the lock."

"Thank you, sir," said Guy, raising, with a feeling of boyish pride, the lid of the desk, and peering into certain pigeon-holes, which were arranged in its depths.

"And what had I better do, sir?" he inquired, after satisfying himself that his desk was a much

finer one than the best that had ever fallen to the lot of any even of the *parlour* boarders at school.

"You will have to copy into this book all the invoices after they are made out, and, when you have a little practice, you must prepare the invoices yourself. All orders, too, received by post, must be taken from the letters and copied into this order-book. You must also make a fair copy of all business letters written by the House to various correspondents; and, in fact, assist me in all the work of the office. You must also try to familiarize yourself with the general character of the business, so as to be able to help in the shop when requisite; and, above all things, let me recommend you to be attentive to Mr B.'s orders, for he cannot bear giving them twice over."

Guy thanked the clerk for his advice, which he promised implicitly to obey, and set to work with a will to copy off sundry letters which had already been written in answer to those received by that morning's post.

If nature had not granted to our young friend a very prepossessing countenance, she had bestowed upon him, by way of compensation, more valuable gifts.

The sweetness of his smile and the agreeable sound of his voice have already been alluded to, and, joined to these important characteristics, was such a naturally courteous manner that it could not fail to attract attention from any person of discriminating power.

Guy Rivers had, moreover, entered upon his new career with a resolution to succeed in it, and he could not, therefore, well fail; for few things in this world, capable of attainment by mankind, can elude the grasp of the zealous and persevering, more especially if there is strong common sense to back them in their endeavours.

With this latter quality the youth was, happily, well endowed. Although, under the influence of a powerful fancy, he yielded sometimes a little too readily to the habit of day-dreaming, which he had acquired during the many hours he had spent alone, he never allowed it to interfere with the serious realities of life; and he could, at a moment's notice, break from the spell that his imagination had woven around him, whenever his attention was demanded for something connected with his work.

The first few hours that the clerk and Guy spent together, were sufficient to convince the former that the youth possessed more than ordinary perception; and it was enough, also, to satisfy Guy that he need fear no difficulty in performing his duties, so far as the office was concerned. How much or how little he would have to overcome in respect of the other departments of the business, time alone could show.

The morning passed over quietly enough. Dinner was served in a lower room to Mr Ruggles, Brand the apprentice, and Guy. Mr Bindwell was not visible any more that day, nor did he ever take his

meals with his subordinates. Tom, the porter, after the clerks had done, dined with an old woman-servant, who was also attached to the business part of the establishment.

Dinner being over, Guy resumed his former place with Mr Ruggles, and, having a sufficiency of work before him for some time, on account of arrears being left by his predecessor, the junior clerk so unfeelingly alluded to by Brand, he applied himself to it with a matter-of-course air which argued well for his intelligence.

He felt pleased to think that his duties were principally of a kind that kept him apart from young Brand, for whom he had somehow, even at this early stage, conceived but little affection.

There was nothing about the lad, in fact, that he could say he admired — neither his face nor his demeanour, neither the tone of his voice nor the style of his discourse. He felt sure that he should never like him, although familiarity might perhaps remove some portion of his actual prejudice.

To tell the truth, this feeling of Guy's towards the apprentice was reciprocated strongly by that individual.

Whether from jealousy or from some other cause, he had taken a sort of dislike to our young friend from the moment he had seen him enter the shop, and had discovered his errand. Being by nature inclined to bully where he thought he could do it with safety, he had lost no time in adopting that course,

which he promised himself to continue ; but he had yet to learn that it was a perilous one to follow with young Guy, if he were desirous to avoid a collision.

The same order was observed at tea as was used at dinner ; and as those were days when early closing had not taken possession of the shopkeeper's mind, the work was continued on till nine o'clock, when the place was closed, supper put on table, and the hour or two intervening between that meal and bedtime was spent by the various members of the establishment in the way that was most congenial to their different tastes.

Guy having procured a candle, proceeded at once up stairs to his room, partly to arrange his things there and to write, or at least commence a letter home, to inform those who were most dear to him of this fresh step in his career of independence.

He had scarcely, however, opened his box to get out the little budget of notes received the day before from his family, than Brand came in.

Without any sort of preface, he said, as he stood before Guy, with his cap cocked on one side of his head, his hands in his pockets, and his legs stretched wide apart :

" I say, old chap, you're a nice one, you are, to sneak off in this way, just as if you'd been here as long as any of us, and without even so much as a drop o' beer to drink to our better acquaintance."

Guy at that time wanted to be alone ; and as Mrs Warkup had told him that the apprentices, if there

were any, would expect to be treated on his first going among them, and had, with thoughtful kindness, supplied him with a little money for the purpose, he took a shilling from his pocket, and, holding it out to the lad, said :

"I'm sorry I can't come with you, for I want to write a letter ; but take this, and drink my health, if you will, with Tom."

The apprentice was a little mollified at sight of the coin, and grumbled out something, in his usual style, about his not liking to drink with a chap's money without the chap himself ; but he took it, notwithstanding, and was not long in departing upon the errand to convert the coin into liquor.

Guy was rejoiced to get rid of him so easily, and at once set about putting matters straight ; for he was by nature neat and orderly, and had long ago acquired from his sisters, in their playful mood, the name of the "Old Bachelor."

He had but small scope on this occasion wherein to exercise his talents, for the whole furniture of that half of the chamber which he could properly call his own, consisted of a bed, a scrap of carpet, a wash-stand, two chairs, and a small deal table, to which was now added his own leather trunk.

But taste may be displayed in arrangement, even if it has been debarred room for exhibition in the choice of material ; and it was surprising how much improvement was produced by making the bed and wash-stand change places, and by putting the little

table, now covered with his books, under the window.

He also drew out from his box a small looking-glass, which he hung against the wall; and procured from the same receptacle a portrait of his mother, cut out in black paper, and fixed in a small black frame. He could not, out of respect for that dear parent, say it at all resembled her; for the outline of the cap which surmounted her head had assumed, under the scissors of the artist, so much the appearance of a *second* face, that it required a good deal of ingenuity on the part of an observer to decide which was the real nose and which the proper mouth of the person represented, for the picture had certainly produced two of each of those features. But it had been drawn for her, and pronounced by the artist "the most successful portrait he had ever taken;" so, why should not Guy esteem it?

It was past ten o'clock by the time the youth had made these various arrangements; and feeling somewhat tired with the events of the day, and aware that the business of the house required him to be early astir, he undressed and went to bed, having first, in a grateful spirit, rendered thanks to God for all the mercies extended to him, and entreated the protection of the Almighty for the beloved ones at home.

He had just stepped into bed, and was about to extinguish his light, when a heavy, blundering step coming up the stairs informed him that his companion, Brand, had returned.

CHAPTER XV.

MR BINDWELL'S HOUSEHOLD—TOM—MASTER AND
PUPIL—A NEW FRIENDSHIP.

HULLOA! old feller!" was the exclamation of the apprentice, as he opened the door, "in bed already!"

His cap was more on one side of his head than ever. Indeed, it appeared so much awry, while his bushy hair protruded in front of it and hung over his forehead, that it was wonderful how it managed to keep on. His ears, however, were of the very largest make, and no doubt served as a shelf or support to the head-covering in question.

Some portion of the beer he had been drinking must have found its way to his face, for it was much redder and damper than usual, though it was always highly coloured and naturally moist or greasy; and one would have thought that another portion of the liquor must still be sticking in his throat, for his speech was somewhat thick, and at times not very intelligible.

It was on coming into the room that Brand made the remark which begins this chapter, when, closing the door somewhat noisily, he repeated it.

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"Yes," said Guy, "I was tired. Besides, it's not so very early;—it's struck ten!"

"I know it has," growled out the other,— "else I should'n't be here."

So saying, he drew a chair towards him, and sitting astraddle upon it, leaned his arms upon the back, and resting his chin upon them, stared with half-shut eyes at Guy, as he lay in bed.

"Is ten o'clock the time to come in?" inquired our young friend.

"Yes, that's the ticket for us; but it's a precious sight too soon;—and I don't mean to put up with it much longer,—that I don't."

There was a pause after this determination had been expressed, during which the apprentice, still keeping in the same position, breathed so heavily that Guy thought he had gone to sleep, and was indulging in a not very harmonious snore.

Suddenly, however, he roused himself, and spoke again.

"How do you like your place, old chap?" he asked.

"Very much indeed," said Guy; "and I'm sure I shall like it more as I go on."

"Will you!" exclaimed the apprentice, with a contemptuous grunt; "that's what you won't, then, I can tell you;—or if you do, you'll be the first cove as ever did."

"But why shouldn't I," asked Guy; "if I like the sort of work I have to do?"

"Oh, don't tell me," said the lad, rolling his chin from side to side on his arms, "for it's all my eye and Betty Martin to talk about liking work of any sort. Besides, it's such a rum place, this is,—and nobody *could* like it. That's what they couldn't."

This was an interesting subject to Guy, upon which he was glad to get information ; and although any intelligence that young Brand was capable of imparting, could not be very reliable, still the youth eagerly seized the opportunity of getting from him what he could. The moment was at least favourable, for, either an account of the beer he had taken, or from some other cause, he seemed inclined to be communicative.

Guy, therefore, taking up his own words, inquired, "What do you mean by saying it's a *rum* place?"

"Why, because there's such a lot of rum people in it, to be sure,—any fool could see that with half an eye. There's master now, who goes on *hm-ing* and *ha-ing*, and saying so little to a feller, that there's no understanding him at all ; and there's the Misses that he keeps shut up and never lets anybody sees" . . .

"Oh ! then he's married," said Guy, with some surprise, for he had somehow formed a notion that the bookseller was a bachelor.

"Of course he is,—and to a lady young enough to be his own daughter. He's precious jealous of her, too, and never lets any of us so much as have

a sight of her. That's the reason the house is cut off from the shop, and you can't get into it without going into the street and in at another door."

"Indeed!" said Guy. "And is she a nice lady?"

"Well, she's precious proud," answered the apprentice, who added, after a pause,—"she ain't bad looking though—and don't she dress neither! my eye!"

From these complicated interjections, Guy gathered that the lady was rather fond of gay clothes; and being desirous to learn more, he asked if Mr Bindwell had any family.

"What, children!" said Brand contemptuously, "I should think not. We're much too fine, we are, to be bothered with brats; besides, they ain't been married long enough."

"I suppose they've a very nice house," said Guy; "it must be pretty large, too."

"I believe you;—it is a nice house and no mistake. But master and misses don't occupy it all. They've got the kitchens and the first floor over the shop, and the third floor and the other garrets. But they've let the second floor to a mad woman."

"A mad woman!" said Guy; "how strange!"

"Leastways, they say she's mad," said Brand,— "I don't know, for I've never seen her. She ain't been here above a month, and she's never been outside the house since she came into it."

The hour of eleven, striking from two or three clocks at once, roused the apprentice from his atti-

tude. He drew the chair from under him, and stretching his arms and opening his jaws to their very fullest extent, he gave vent to a yawn which might have been heard from the shop below, and, stripping off his things, rolled himself into bed, and without vouchsafing another word, was soon snoring in good earnest.

The few particulars Guy Rivers had thus obtained of the persons connected with his master, only increased his desire to know more, but some time was destined to elapse ere his wish could be in the slightest manner gratified.

With his master himself, although seeing him every day, he had little communication, Mr Bindwell being often as oblivious of his presence as if he were a mere lay figure, without hearing, sight, or feeling.

Guy was at first a little pained at this indifference, because he feared that it arose from a dislike taken either to himself or to the way in which he did his work ; but when a closer observation proved to him that his master acted pretty much in the same mode towards others, he became more quieted, and at last fell into the habit of continuing his own duties, unless when spoken to, in a like abstracted manner.

Almost as little information touching the family was obtainable from Mr Ruggles, the senior clerk, as from the principal himself. He very rarely alluded to its members, and never did so except in general

terms, and Guy was happily wise enough to refrain from displaying his curiosity by direct questions.

Brand had evidently told all he knew, or if he had not, there existed too little cordiality between himself and Guy for the latter to draw from him any further intelligence.

The fact was, that two natures could scarcely be found more uncongenial and opposed to each other than those of the apprentice and the junior clerk.

The former was coarse, indolent, and inclined to drink, with an abusive tongue, where he could use it without danger to himself, yet ready to cringe before those whom he had reason to fear.

Guy, on the other hand, notwithstanding his heavy, and, as some thought, even sullen features, had an innate politeness of disposition which arose from a true and tender heart; he was the very reverse of idle, though given, as has been said, to reverie; and sad experience had impressed him with such a horror of intemperance, that, like his favourite, Dr Franklin, he had made himself for the time a stout water-drinker.

Strangely enough there existed much more cordiality between Tom the porter, and himself, than had sprung up between him and Brand.

It has been already observed with respect to this same Tom, that his aspect more reminded the youth of a prize-fighter than a servant of a quiet establishment like Mr Bindwell's.

The guess which consigned him to the "brethren of the fist," was, to a certain extent, a true one, for Tom was an enthusiastic admirer of the "ring," and had on several occasions "stood up" before some of the first "professors" of the art.

It was this very inclination which first drew Guy and himself more prominently together; and thus it fell out:

Tom's education had been very sadly neglected, and although constantly surrounded by books,—which he was in the daily habit of handling,—he was able, poor fellow, to derive but little benefit from their contents, for the simple reason that he could only read with difficulty.

It happened one day that there had been a great pugilistic fight, with which—it was the fashion of the time—the whole world of London was ringing. Everybody was talking about it, and every one seemed eager to obtain the minutest particulars of the "great mill."

It may well be believed that Tom, with his strong feelings on the subject, was very excited, and most anxious to hear "all about it."

He had procured a copy of "Bell's Life," where seven closely-printed columns were devoted to a description of it; but, alas! the task of reading through those endless lines of small print was far beyond the strong man's powers.

In this dilemma he came to Guy, who, before that time, had neither sought nor avoided him, but who

always greeted him with a kind word and a smile when they met in the morning.

"Would Master Rivers read him a little bit of it?"

Guy had lighted his candle—it was nine o'clock—and was going up into his own room to peruse a work lent him by Mr Ruggles. Still, with his customary good nature, he would not refuse a request thus made him. He therefore answered cheerfully,

"Yes, Tom, certainly. Come up into our room, and I'll read it all to you."

He was not aware of the task he had undertaken; for the account, as we observed, was of great length, and it occupied the whole evening till bed-time ere he got through it. But the hours so spent were far from being unprofitable to Guy, as they laid the foundation of a very friendly feeling, which subsisted ever after between the two.

Tom was in ecstasy at the clear and forcible way in which Guy read the account; for as he warmed with his subject, the youth's eye flashed, his tone became more impressive, and the description, which was written with considerable power, assumed for his hearer all the interest of a moving romance.

Tom's appearance, indeed, while the reading was going on, would have been a study worthy of a great artist.

The veins in his brawny throat swelled far beyond their natural size, big drops of perspiration stood out upon his forehead like beads, his flattened nostrils expanded with emotion, and his whole face exhibited

a mingled look of intensity and fierceness which would have become a Roman gladiator.

Nor were his limbs unmoved at the narrative thus vividly brought before him. He shifted the position of his legs every other minute, clenched his fists with a tightness that almost drove the ponderous knuckles through the skin, and occasionally rubbed them up and down his thighs or the calves of his legs, as if they itched with a desire to use them upon some antagonist.

His gratitude to Guy for the pleasure he had thus afforded him, was shown in a way that was truly characteristic.

"Did you ever put on the gloves, Muster Rivers?" he inquired, before they parted for the night.

"No," answered Guy, "but I should like to; for it's a famous thing to be able to take one's own part, even sometimes against a bigger fellow than one's self, merely through understanding how to use one's fists."

"And so it is, Muster Guy; so if so be as you'd like to learn, I've got a friend as 'll lend me the gloves, and I'll teach you. All that I hope is, you won't mind sometimes just reading me a little bit as you've done to-night; for, upon my soul, it's been as good as a play to me."

"And so I will, Tom, with pleasure," said Guy heartily; "and I mean to take you at your word, too, so don't forget it."

"Never fear me, Muster Rivers."

And Tom was as good as his word, and took a special interest in making an accomplished boxer of our young friend, who, on his part, stuck to his lessons with all the energy and perseverance which formed a peculiar feature of his character.

Nor was he unmindful of the wish of Tom. As, however, there were not always descriptions of "great fights" ready to the hand, Guy taught him to take an interest in other matters of a less pugnacious character, and read to him his "Life of Franklin," and the "Adventures of Robinson Crusoe," and sundry other works of the kind, with which Tom, after a time, grew wonderfully fond. Finding, however, that this reading aloud took up a good deal of time, Guy, little by little, induced his rough master to become a pupil in turn, and devote his attention to learning to read fluently for himself, which, through Tom's growing liking for the youth, he was easily induced to do, and in which he succeeded far beyond his expectations.

From reading, Guy led him on to writing; and, although it was indeed an arduous task to teach those strong clumsy fingers to grasp a pen, they were at length persuaded to do so, and that with a result which, if not brilliant, was nevertheless of incalculable benefit to the man, and was very creditable to the youthful teacher.

It may be naturally asked, "What of Brand the apprentice all this time? was he never at home of an evening, or did he take no part in these proceedings?"

In reply to this, it may be stated, that that individual rarely did remain at home for a longer period than he was compelled to do. His fondness for the tavern was unfortunately becoming every day more marked, and directly business was over, and the shutters were up, the lad was speeding through the "Bar," and making his way to some favourite "Coal Hole" in the Strand.

In any other establishment than Mr Bindwell's, this irregularity could not have passed, as it did, unnoticed. But with the exception of Tom and Guy, and, probably, old Susan the woman-servant, who occupied the regions below, the outgoings and incomings of the apprentice were not known. So long as all were in the house at five minutes past ten, when Mr Bindwell or Mr Ruggles saw to the closing of the doors, no inquiries were made; and the lad was, therefore, enabled to continue his vicious course without the slightest let or hindrance.

It might have been a puzzle for any person who chose to give the subject a thought, to explain how such a lad, whose family was comparatively poor, and whose own pocket-money was of the most limited amount, could meet the expense of this nightly carousing,—for it was not credible that, however numerous his boon companions, and however generous they might be in their cups, they should *always* be treating him, or that the landlord of the house which he frequented, should have conceived such an affection for him as to make him a

present of his liquor. But as no person ever *did* give himself the trouble to investigate the matter, the riddle remained unsolved, until an event, which will be hereafter alluded to, gave an explanation to the mystery.

As neither Guy on his side, nor Tom on his, was desirous of hearing the criticism of the lad upon the endeavours each was making to become a proficient in the arts they were both pursuing, they tacitly forbore practising or alluding to them during those rare occasions when Brand remained at home, so that he continued in perfect ignorance of their method of passing their time, and was too absorbed in his own pleasures, or too muddled in his ideas during the day, to make any inquiry upon the subject.

CHAPTER XVI.

A PEEP AT FAMILY MATTERS—GUY'S ENGAGEMENT—A
WALK AND AN INCIDENT—THE FIGHT—CHANGE OF
QUARTERS.

THE month of trial which Guy had to pass through before attaining to the dignity of a regular engagement, was drawing to an end.

During that time, more than one letter had passed between the youth, struggling in his path of independence, and his mother and sister Sophy, but no line had been received from his father.

The accounts from home rarely made any other allusion to him than what concerned his health, which did not appear to be of a very satisfactory kind; and Guy rightly judged, from the continued silence respecting his habits, that there was but little, if any, improvement to report.

Guy also concluded from the absence of any word of advice or kindness in his handwriting, that he was offended at the manner in which his son had left his roof; and in this particular likewise, his conjecture was not far from the truth.

Mr Rivers was by nature a proud and unyielding man, who demanded implicit obedience from those

about him, and who could not brook the slightest opposition to his wishes. Unfortunately he made no allowance for the possession of equally unbending qualities in others; and although it was the most natural thing in the world that his son should inherit some portion of his own disposition, he could not forgive him for thus daring to have an opinion of his own. If he had reasoned the matter out, he must have arrived at a conclusion very favourable to Guy; for the poor boy had only left his home, when taunted, and, morally speaking, driven to do so, and his sole object in quitting his father's roof was to relieve his parent of a burden which, according to his own showing, was a heavy and a painful one. But Mr Rivers did not, and would not, reason. With a dogged perverseness, which was unworthy of a man, and, above all, of a father, he would mutter to himself, "He has chosen to go—so let him go—let him starve—an undutiful young scamp,—but there's no fear of that—he'll be back home before it comes to that!"

It was not with his family only that Guy kept up a regular correspondence. Mrs Warkup obtained, as she deserved, a large measure of the youth's attention. At her own request he wrote to her regularly twice a week, and he had been to see her once since his stay at Mr Bindwell's.

And how she treasured those little letters of her adopted son!—for so she was pleased to call and consider Guy. How many times did she not read

them over, and show them to such of her neighbours as most possessed her confidence! "They were so nicely written," she said; "the handwriting was so plain;—just what writing ought to be,—intended to be read;—not one of your horrid scrawls that nobody could make out, but clear and sensible, and almost as easily understood as print!"

The Sunday afternoon which Guy spent with her was indeed a holiday. If she had deliberately resolved to do her best to make him ill, by stuffing him with good things, she could not have got together a larger amount. Fortunately, his digestion was a good one—at his age digestions generally are—and so the banquet, garnished for the occasion with a glass of her best port, had no other effect upon him than making him very sleepy before tea-time, and causing a slight sensation of fulness all next morning.

Two days before the month was expired,—it was in the evening just before the close of business,—Mr Bindwell came into the office where Guy and Mr Ruggles were engaged at work.

It was an unusual time for him to pay them a visit, as he rarely made his appearance after tea, except for a few minutes to superintend the final closing.

He addressed himself to Guy in his usual abrupt tone.

"The day after to-morrow, Rivers, you have been with us a month."

"Yes, sir," said Guy, who felt no slight trepida-

tion, as the subject, which was so near his heart, was mentioned.

"Do you like your place?" was the next inquiry.

"Yes, sir," said Guy readily; "very much—and I hope, sir," he added, "that you are satisfied with me?"

"Pretty well—pretty well—I may say, very well—eh, Ruggles."

"Yes, sir," said Mr Ruggles, "the lad does his work carefully and thoroughly."

"Hm!—ha!—hm!" ejaculated Mr Bindwell; who, after a pause, turned sharply to Guy, and said:

"Well, boy, if you choose to continue with us, and will promise to attend to your work as you have hitherto done, you are welcome to do so."

"I shall be very happy—very proud, sir, to remain," said Guy, with a slight tremor in his voice which a little betrayed his agitation.

"And," continued Mr Bindwell, "I will allow you as a beginning, for the first twelvemonth, sixteen pounds a-year,—the salary which was paid to the last junior whose place you fill.—What say you, eh?"

Guy's heart at the moment was too full to say anything,—and to his annoyance the fulness was overflowing into his eyes, and producing a choky feeling in his throat.

Sixteen pounds a-year is not a very magnificent sum, but everything in this world has a relative value; and in the eyes of Guy, the salary appeared

quite princely. He had expected ten or twelve at the most—to commence with; but here were *sixteen* offered him; four more than his most sanguine expectations had anticipated. How could he feel otherwise than moved and flurried?

But Mr Bindwell was waiting for a reply, and he was a gentleman who did not like to wait for anything. So Guy gulped down his emotion as he best could, and expressed his thankfulness in the first words that came uppermost. The feeling which dictated them came from the heart, so that there is no doubt they were appropriate, even if a little warm. At all events Mr Bindwell did not complain of them; he only smiled slightly,—a very unusual recreation with him, at least in business—and merely exclaiming, “Well, that’s settled,” left the office.

With Mr Ruggles’ permission, Guy himself left too, almost immediately afterwards. He felt that he required air to breathe more freely, and greater space for the thoughts and fancies teeming in his brain.

He, therefore, plunged into the street, where it is so easy to feel alone, though surrounded by hundreds of human beings, and went with the stream through Temple Bar, and along the Strand to Charing Cross.

Turning to the left towards Parliament Street, he passed Whitehall, and reached the foot of Westminster Bridge, just as a crowd had assembled at the top of the steps leading to the water.

“What’s the matter?” inquired Guy of a woman,

who stood on the outskirts of the throng, but who, evidently from her excited manner, was capable of giving the necessary information.

"Oh, it's a poor girl," she answered, "the water-men have just fished out of the river; poor thing! I knew her very well, but I didn't think she'd do that, I didn't. She couldn't get no work—she hadn't no father nor mother—she wouldn't go to the workhouse,—and so she's gone and drowned herself, poor creature!"

"Was she old?" asked Guy, moved at this simple but sad story.

"Lor' bless you, no! she was only fifteen, poor child!"

"Only fifteen!" murmured Guy to himself, as he drew away from the throng, and retraced his steps towards Charing Cross;—"only fifteen! my own age! and it might have been my fate just as much as this poor girl's, if God had not taken pity on me and given me work. And why should God have had pity on me more than on this poor girl?"

But there he stopped short, for he had touched upon one of those mysterious themes which have puzzled wiser heads than his, and have driven some brains mad with thinking. His good sense dictated to him the wisest answer to the question,—viz., to pity the wretched child whose end had been so untimely—to thank Heaven for the favour vouchsafed to himself, and pray for its protection to fulfil the duties of his position in a faithful and honest manner.

This incident, and the reflections arising out of it, had given so elevated a tone to his mind, that when, on again reaching the Strand, he was accosted by a smart slap on the back, and a loud and vulgar ejaculation, the action and words jarred terribly on his spirit.

He turned sharply round at the rude salute, and discovered young Brand, the apprentice,—who had evidently been drinking—with a couple of shabby-looking young men beside him.

“I say,—old—Guy Fawkes,” he blurted out, as, stretching his legs wide apart, he stood in front of the youth, whose face was crimson at being thus addressed—“upon my soul you’ve got a sly way of sneaking off, you have, just when you ought to stand a pot, you old Guy Fawkes, you! Only look you here now,” he hiccuped out to his companions—“this is our junior clerk—this is—and he’s been and got engaged to-day, at no end of a salary, and wants to sneak off without giving a chap—Hullo! he’s off—I say,—here—old Guy Fawkes!”

Guy had turned upon his heel, angered at this low address, and at the half dozen gaping boys which it had already gathered round them; for young Brand spoke in the very loudest tone, and his words might have been heard across the street.

When the apprentice, therefore, caught hold of his arm to stop him, he turned upon him sharply, and throwing off his hand, exclaimed, in perhaps too scornful a manner,—“Go your ways, Master Brand,

and let me go mine. And, please, keep your nicknames to yourself!"

"Whew!" whistled Brand, who, encouraged by the presence of his companions, heated by the beer he had taken, and feeling all at once a revival of the jealousy and envy with which he had regarded Guy from his first entrance into the establishment of his master, assumed a tone of the most offensive character; "You mean to be bouncible, do you—Mr—Guy Fawkes? we'll soon take your bounce out of you, we will, if you mean that, come!"

And so speaking, he caught hold of Guy's cap, and twitching it off his head, sent it flying into the road under the wheels of a passing dray, amid the jeers of the aforesaid boys and loud laughter from the friends of the half-tipsy apprentice.

This insult was more than Guy could bear. His face, which had been scarlet, suddenly became of a death-like pallor, a frown lowered on his brow, and his teeth closed upon each other with a stern rigidity, which showed the feeling that was working within him.

It worked quickly, and in the course of a few seconds came to a head; for, drawing himself a little back, he planted with his left hand such a blow upon the capacious nose of the apprentice as sent him reeling some paces backwards, while the blood flowed freely from the injured member.

"Brayvo! Well done, little 'un!" and sundry other ejaculations of the same kind were at once

uttered by the crowd, which had grown considerably greater in an instant.

"A ring! A ring! Fair play!" were the exclamations which immediately followed, as Brand, having somewhat recovered from the shock of the assault, and encouraged by his friends, prepared to avenge the blow.

Guy looked round, and to his horror discovered that he was placed within a circle of eager faces, composed principally of boys and labouring men, with his master's apprentice opposite him for antagonist.

He was too indignant, however, just at that time to think of drawing back; so, perceiving Brand strip off his jacket, he at once imitated his example, fully determined in his own mind to do his best to give the fellow a sound drubbing.

The crowd had now swollen to a very considerable extent, but the space round the two principals was kept clear by one or two brawny fellows, who loved a "fight" of all things, and who had taken upon themselves, with perfect enjoyment, the task of seeing "fair play."

When both combatants had stripped to their trowsers and shirt, Brand, confident in his superior height, strength, and age, made a rush at young Guy, with the idea of finishing him at once.

But it was not for nothing that our young friend had been trained by so expert a boxer as Tom. It was evident to the most inexperienced of the by-

standers, that the youth was infinitely more than a match for the apprentice, notwithstanding the apparent advantages of the latter; for the blows aimed wildly by Brand were stopped in a manner which called forth renewed cries of admiration, while a dash out from Guy's right fist, which caught his antagonist just below the chin, sent him staggering back into the arms of his friends, and would have certainly "flooded" him but for their support.

Fresh exclamations of "Brayvo!" "Two to one on the little 'un!" "That's your sort!" were mingled with others of a somewhat similar character. But before a fresh round was begun, a commotion on the outskirts of the crowd proved that something unusual was affecting the distant spectators. It was not long in communicating itself to the innermost ranks of the circle, for a friendly baker's man, who had taken charge of Guy's jacket and waistcoat, threw them over his shoulders, and said, "You'd better cut your stick, young fellow, for here's the police!"

Guy lost not a moment in following the advice, as he thought it would indeed be a climax to the evening's diversions to be shut up in the Station House, and punished for no fault of his own. Accompanied, therefore, by his chance friend, he plunged into the thickest of the throng, and managed to get away in safety to a distance from the scene of the encounter.

He was more fortunate on this occasion of his being in a crowd than he had found himself the last

time, when he upset the old Irishwoman's apple stall; for not only did he lose nothing out of his pockets, but even his cap—somewhat crushed, it is true, by the wheel of the dray—had been gathered up by a friendly hand, and passed to the baker who held his clothes, during the commencement of the disturbance.

"I needn't ask you, my lad, if you're hurt?" said the man admiringly, "for I saw that big fellow didn't even touch you. You stopped that left-hander of his beautiful!"

"Do you think so?" said Guy. "It's a pity we didn't have a few minutes longer, for I think I should have polished him off!"

"I'm sure you would," said the baker approvingly. "It's clear to see you're in practice."

"A little," remarked Guy, with a feeling of gratified vanity,—“just a little. But this is my road; thank you. Good night.”

They shook hands and parted; the youth making the best of his way back to his quarters, ruminating, as he went, on the affray which had taken place, and how it was likely to affect him.

"I'm sure I couldn't help it," he argued; "it was no fault of mine; I didn't want to quarrel, much less fight, but it was forced upon me. It's very unlucky; the very first day of my engagement, too. One thing I'm resolved on, however, if I can manage it"—and with that he fell thinking.

Directly he reached the shop he proceeded to

carry the "one thing resolved upon" into effect, and fortunately the person who could best assist him in it opened the door.

"Good evening, Tom."

"Good evening, Muster Guy. Why! your cap's been in the mud. Lor! what a mess it's in!"

"Yes," said Guy, taking it off, and turning it round and round upon his finger so as to bring each part in turn under the inspection of his eye; "it's in a pretty state, isn't it? But come up stairs and I'll tell you how it got so."

And the two mounted the steep stair-case together.

When they were seated, Guy proceeded to give an exact account of what had occurred, which, of course, threw Tom into a perspiring state of excitement.

"I wish I'd been with you, Muster Guy. There's nothing I should have liked so much as to have seen you make a mummy of that young Brand!"

"Well, I don't think *I* should like to have gone so far as that, Tom," said Guy, half laughing; "but I've left my mark on him."

"Serve him right!" exclaimed Tom. "I wish you'd left a dozen!"

"Now, Tom," said Guy, seriously, "I want you to do me a great favour."

"What is it, Muster Guy? say but the word and it shall be done; you know that very well. Do you want to make arrangements for a regular set to?"

"Not exactly," answered the youth, "unless

Brand is quite agreeable. Any how, there's time enough for that. But it's quite another thing just now. The favour I wish you to do me is to change rooms with me ; for, feeling as I do, I shall never be able to sleep comfortably in the same room with *him*."

"But,—Muster Guy!" began Tom in a tone of remonstrance.

"Ah!" said the youth despondently, "I was afraid you wouldn't like it when I asked you,—so don't think any more about it."

"But it's not that," exclaimed Tom, "it's not that at all I mean ; what I wanted to say, only you wouldn't let me finish, was, that it isn't at all fit for a young gentleman like you. You're as welcome to it as my own father would be ; only it's such a poor place,—and yours," he added, looking round the chamber, "at least your part of it, is so neat and nice—with the books and the pictures—that mine can't hold a candle to it."

"I don't want it to. Besides, that's nothing to do with it," said Guy, brightening up again, as Tom gave this reason for his hesitation ; "nothing at all. For if I like to make the change—for the cause I told you—and you don't mind it, why who's the worse? It'll be doing me a real kindness."

"Will it?" said Tom, starting up ; "then I've nothing more to say ; we'll move the traps at once."

And with that he opened the door, crossed the landing, plunged into his own room, and putting out

his great strength, soon shifted his bed and furniture into the much larger apartment, hitherto occupied by Guy. He then procured a broom, and, with the greatest care, swept it carefully out; although, thanks to old Susan, both rooms were equally clean, but he did it for his own satisfaction. This operation being over, he shifted all Guy's things into the smaller chamber, and assisted the youth to arrange them with the minute interest of a child and all the care of a woman, and had the satisfaction, when the work was done, to receive a joyful shake of the hand, and a look of even warmer thanks from his young friend.

"Good night, sir," said Tom, when the removal was quite over, and he closed the door. Opening it, however, again, in an instant afterwards, he put his round face inside, while an expressive grin lighted up all his features, and said, —

"Won't young Fire-Brand stare when he sees there's another man in possession; my eye!"

And without waiting for an answer, he again closed the door, and, crossing to his new quarters, began arranging his furniture as nearly as possible in the way that he had been accustomed to admire when he had sat there, evening after evening, taking lessons of his young friend.

Guy, on his part, made such other alterations as he thought necessary in his new apartment, and then sat down to give a look round and note where he might still further improve it.

Tom was right; the room was very inferior to the one he had left—inferior, not merely in size and convenience, but in having so low a roof that it was only along one part of it that even Guy, with his comparatively short stature, could walk upright.

It had one window, opening, like those in the other chamber, on to a parapet of stone, with the difference, that this was at the back of the house, while the other faced the street.

In this difference, however, lay, according to Guy's notions, a great advantage, for the place was so much quieter and pleasanter for reading—the roar of the street only falling upon the ear in a subdued manner, like the incessant roll of distant thunder.

There was but little space between the bed and the table, and still less between the latter and his box. It would require some study to be able to wash himself without bumping his head against the ceiling—a lesson which Tom must have been very long learning, if one might judge from the numerous round marks left upon the plaster. And it would, no doubt, be a work of time to learn to dress himself, after his ablutions were over, without dislocating his neck or growing round-shouldered.

Still, in spite of these drawbacks, Guy felt convinced in his own mind that he should like his new quarters infinitely more than the last, if it were only to escape from the companionship of young Brand; besides, that it still further increased his feeling of independence to have a room to himself, however

small and mean, where he could read, or write, or indulge his fancies without having them rudely broken or dispersed by a coarse word or joke from an unsympathetic partner, just as a spider's web, with all its beautiful tracery, is utterly destroyed and demolished by the ruthless hand of a thoughtless child.

It was, therefore, with a feeling of calm contentment that Guy undressed in his new chamber, and shut it out from his view by extinguishing his light.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SULKY APPRENTICE—A LITTLE MORE ABOUT THE
FAMILY—A STRANGE LANDSCAPE—A NEW ACQUAINT-
ANCE.

GUY'S first impulse, on going down to the shop next morning, was to walk up to Brand, who, with his back to the staircase, stood selecting a parcel of books for a country order.

"Good morning, Brand," said Guy.

The apprentice made no answer.

"I'm sorry," said Guy, after a moment's pause, "that we should have had a set-to last night ; but, if you'll shake hands and be friends again, we'll say nothing more about it."

This proposal met with as little reply as the salutation. Perhaps Brand thought, as he had had the worst of the "set-to," that any offer of reconciliation should come from himself.

Guy felt his face flushing at this contemptuous way of receiving his advances ; but he had made up his mind to keep down his temper, and he succeeded.

Perhaps the coolness he showed in its place was not calculated to allay the irritation of the apprentice ; yet he, too, from some hidden cause, showed a desire not to give way to anger.

A reasonable time having elapsed for a reply, and none being forthcoming, and as the lad still kept his back turned towards the youth, Guy spoke again :

"Look you, Brand, you quarrelled with me last night without any cause, and provoked me into striking you ; but I say, I am willing to think no more about it if you choose to shake hands."

No answer.

Guy continued : "Our set-to was interrupted ; but if you want to fight it out, remember, I'm ready for you at any time or any place where we're not likely to be interfered with, so do as you like."

* Thus speaking, the youth, with a grand sort of air, which was half-dignified and half-laughable, turned upon his heel and walked into the office.

Three or four days passed over without a word passing between the two. No notice was taken of Brand's swollen nose, although it was a prominent object enough ; for in those days it was so much the custom to settle points of difference with the fist, that a black eye or a bruised face excited but little attention.

Guy did not trouble himself very much about this sulkiness on the part of the apprentice. During working hours he was too much engaged even to speak to him had he been so inclined. Except at meals, indeed, they never met ; and when there, as it was a busy time, they took their food in haste, and returned at once to their occupations. In the evening Brand was off directly the shutters were up,

and Guy either had a stroll in the neighbourhood, or retired to his room to read some book lent him by the senior clerk, or write a few lines home or to Mrs Warkup.

It may be thought that, as no mention has been made of the subject, Guy felt very little curiosity about the family with which he had, so to speak, become connected; and that he accepted the position of being debarred even a sight of any member of it, beyond his master, with singular indifference.

But, to tell the truth, this was not by any means the case. The youth's curiosity was not small; neither was he satisfied with Mr Bindwell's jealous shutting away of his family from all communication with his business-people.

In order to excuse, in the eyes of our young readers, the apparent impertinence of Guy Rivers, for presuming to have an opinion on such a subject, it will be advisable to say a few words, simply to explain the difference which a quarter of a century or so has produced in the mode of life of city men.

In these our present days—days, where a merchant or tradesman resides far away from the place where his affairs are transacted—it is very natural that there should be no link whatsoever between his home and the persons that he employs.

But it was not so at the time of which we are treating. The present suburbs of the great metropolis were then so many scattered villages, with

country roads lying between them and the city, and which were only reached by a stage-coach or van making occasional journeys. Omnibuses were as yet unknown. Railroads were, of course, not even dreamt of. And the thousand facilities which now exist for transporting oneself from one extremity of the metropolis to the other, were still to be created.

Men of business, therefore, at the period of which we are speaking, lived in the houses where their occupations were carried on, and most of the people in their employ found a lodging beneath the same roof. It was then frequently the custom for masters to receive their clerks at their tables; they often, indeed, took all their meals together; and it rarely happened, even in the proudest houses, that a month would pass over without something like a reunion taking place of the entire members of the family and establishment.

Guy, therefore, had some reason for surprise at the strict seclusion in which Mr Bindwell kept his family. Not only, as we have before observed, did no communication exist between the business portion of the house and the residence (it being necessary to go out at the shop-door and enter by a private door opening on to the street, when desirous of visiting the dwelling), but during the five weeks the youth had been in his situation, he had not ever heard Mr Bindwell once allude to the family of which he was the head; while Brand, according to his own showing, had only by chance set eyes upon

his master's wife, though attached for the last twelve months to the establishment, and knew nothing whatsoever, beyond the merest gossip, of the other inmates of the house.

In a cautious way Guy had tried to learn whether his friend Tom could throw any light upon the subject.

That worthy individual, however, was found to be almost as much in the dark as the apprentice himself.

Susan had told him that the "missus," for all her fine dresses and proud ways, was "not a lady;" and that the two servants were "disagreeable things;" the cook being a "stuck-up body," who pretended to be somebody, especially on Sundays; and that the housemaid was a "forward young minx," who'd never come to any good.

Guy would himself willingly have got more information than this out of the old woman, and, perhaps, might have tried to do so; but the fact was, Susan was so frightfully deaf, that any question put to her had to be uttered in a key loud enough to be heard up stairs, and he never had a chance of making an inquiry except in the presence of one or two others.

One more ray of intelligence was, however, imparted by Tom to the few scraps of information that Guy had succeeded in gleaning, — viz., that the "mad woman" (so called by Brand) who occupied the second floor, was the only sister of Mr Bindwell;

and that her madness, if so it could be styled, was a deep and absorbing grief, the cause of which was unknown to honest Tom.

It is strange how often in this world we pursue an object that persistently eludes our grasp, and which we at last attain without any effort of our own, and when we have even almost dismissed it from our thoughts.

As long as Guy did his best to procure some account of the secluded, and to him mysterious family, the scraps of intelligence he gathered were scarcely worth the trouble they had cost him; but when he gave up the matter, as unattainable, it suddenly threw itself unsolicited in his way.

It was a Sunday afternoon; and as, on the previous Sabbath, he had been permitted to visit his good friend Mrs Warkup, he passed this holy day at home.

He had been to church in the morning, and had taken a walk after dinner; but having an interesting book to finish, which he had promised to return the following day, he made his walk a short one, and on reaching home, retired at once to his room.

The day had proved sultry, with but very little air stirring, and his chamber, being under the roof, was rather close and uncomfortable.

To prevent feeling too sensibly the oppressive effect of the enclosed atmosphere, Guy had opened his window to the fullest extent, and himself getting on to the window ledge, which was very broad, he

leaned his back against one extremity of it, and placed his feet against the other.

This elevated position had a double advantage. It enabled him to get all the air that *was* stirring, and presented him, when his eyes were fatigued with keeping them fixed upon the book, and they were raised from the page and allowed to glance around, with an extensive prospect.

Yes, an extensive prospect truly; a landscape even if one will, but where not an inch of land was to be seen; where there were no trees, no water, no fields, no hedges, no roads; not even a carriage, or a horse or cart, though the din which uprose from the streets below, proved that vehicles, at least, were not far distant.

The view before him, extensive as we have described it, and extensive as it truly might be called, was made up of totally different elements to those which usually compose a landscape. Bricks and mortar, tiles and slates, with a sprinkling of stone and metal, composed the whole sum; and yet, if closely observed, as Guy remarked it on that Sunday afternoon, it was not destitute of variety.

Quite in the foreground of the prospect,—for it was but across the street,—was a sight which formed quite a little picture of itself.

Some enthusiastic lover of gardening,—some country-bred citizen it might be, out of whose memory the grinding of the town had not entirely worn the impression of early life,—had succeeded in

cultivating on the roof of his dwelling a parterre of flowers.

It was probable that, grown as they were in pots, the earth of which had but little chance of renovation, and sprinkled as they must have been at every instant by the "blacks" which were so abundant in the region where they dwelt, they would not bear a close inspection with advantage; but viewed at the distance at which Guy beheld them, their leaves looked green and their blossoms gay,—a very oasis in the waste and desert of dingy red all round.

It has been observed, that a great part of the picturesqueness of a landscape depends upon the irregularity of the soil; and that the undulating line, presented by successive hills and dales, cannot fail to be pleasing to the eye.

The view spread out before the young observer on this occasion, possessed these qualities in an eminent degree; yet they signally failed to make an agreeable prospect.

A thousand roofs rose, and fell, and twisted, and turned, and stood at every angle for which mathematicians have invented a name; but they were uninteresting enough notwithstanding. The houses themselves were as irregular in height as they were various in character,—yet they failed to excite pleasure. There was one feature, however, of the view thus presented to young Guy, which, when once it fully caught his attention, supplied him with some amusement,—although the interest it

excited in his mind rather arose from a sense of oddness than from any other feeling.

We refer to the extensive army of chimney-pots, which, from the youth's lofty seat, were brought within complete range of his eye, and that appeared marshalled before him in almost every shape that human ingenuity had been able to devise for their construction.

Although the tall sugar-loaf form predominated to such a degree as to muster not merely in companies, but entire regiments, differing only in their degrees of elevation, the introduction of metal tops, for the intended cure of smoky chimneys, had put an end for ever to all charge of monotony in respect of the shapes of those useful conduits.


The least fanciful of persons might have likened to many strange things the aspects which these chimney-pots assumed ; while those whose imaginations were easily excited, could have created weird and curious stories out of their fantastic forms.

There were some arranged with such perfect regularity, and that yet differed so in height and bore, that Guy compared them to the pipes of a colossal organ, to which the boisterous equinoctial gales must often have supplied the necessary wind. Some, again, appeared with cowls above their heads ; and as they swung with every action of the breeze, complained and groaned as if in bodily or mental pain—like unto monks retired from the world, and moaning over the sins and sorrow that it held.

There were others which assumed the shape of monstrous serpents, writhing and twisting from the house-top, as though their extremities were caught below, and were being subjected to great torture. Guy, as he surveyed them further, and peered deeper into their ranks, remarked many of them in the shape of letters of the alphabet, so that an imperfect "horn-book" might have been compiled from the materials they presented. And he observed, in more than one instance, rising from the roof, a very telescope of chimney-pots drawn out to its fullest extent, with the small end visible high up in air.

The youth, during his intervals of reading, had remarked all these things, and sometimes smiled at the conceits which their appearance created in his brain. He had at length fallen into one of his reveries, where the familiar sights of home rose in his mind, and supplied other images in place of those actually before him. Unconsciously to himself, he began, in a low tone, singing a plaintive air, which was a favourite of his mother's, and that had soothed him more than once in infancy, as she sat warbling it beside his cradle.

Suddenly, much to his surprise and not a little to his alarm—so mysterious did the circumstance appear—the notes were imitated by a female voice somewhere in his vicinity, and were continued very sweetly to the end of the verse, in the middle of which he had himself stopped short.



Guy might perhaps, in his imagination, have attributed these sounds to a supernatural source, and, in fact, was for the moment inclined to do so ; but all such fantastic notions were shortly put to flight by the voice striving further to attract his attention by the common ejaculation of, " I say ! I say !" repeated two or three times successively.

Stretching his head forward beyond the window, he perceived a similar attic casement to his own, about half a dozen yards from it ; and saw, between some iron bars by which the other window was protected, the flutter of a cap-ribbon.

Still looking in the same direction, he observed a hand put out and make a motion, beckoning him, while the voice again exclaimed :

" I say ! Do come here, just for a moment ; do !"

Guy hesitated.

The window whence the voice proceeded was in the attic of the private house occupied by his master, and the youth had already seen and heard enough of Mr Bindwell's domestic economy to feel sure that that gentleman would not approve of any communication being thus effected. The very fact of the window being barred like a convent or a prison, proved that he had no wish to have his privacy broken into.

Still, the youth was curious to see something of one at least of the members of the family ; and, to judge from the encouragement held out, this feeling was reciprocal in that one instance.

So, after hesitating for some little time, during which the voice had repeated its invitation and the hand had beckoned more impatiently, Guy allowed his legs to find their way outside his window into the leaden gutter beneath, along which he gently walked until he stood in front of the barred casement, and face to face with a pretty girl of seventeen.

"How d'ye do?" was her first ejaculation, as Guy's face caught her eye. "Are you the young gentleman that's come last?"

"I'm very well, thank you," answered Guy to the first inquiry; "and I've been here a little more than a month," he replied to the second. Then, putting a question in his turn, he said, "Was it you singing just now?"

"Was it *you*?" answered the girl. "I heard some one singing a song I used to know at home, down in the country—a song I haven't heard for many a day—and I went on with it. But it was you began it."

"Yes," said Guy; "it was one I used to hear at home, down at Maidstone."

"Lor!" exclaimed the girl, "did you come from Maidstone, though? Well, that is funny! for, do you know, I came from East Farleigh."

The fact of their respective birth-places being so near made them feel much more at ease with one another; so Guy sat himself down without more ado on the shelving slates opposite her window, while the girl jammed herself upon her window-sill, as the

youth had previously done on his, and held on by the bars to keep herself from falling.

Their relative positions being thus arranged, if not to their satisfaction, at least with as near an approach to comfort as circumstances would allow, the conversation reopened with fresh vigour.

"What's your name?" asked the girl.

"Guy Rivers," was his answer. "And yours?"

"Lucy Prindle; I'm the housemaid here."

"I thought so," said Guy; "and there's a cook, isn't there?"

"Oh, yes; a nasty, cross thing. But she's gone out this afternoon, and I'm quite alone in the house, that is, except Madam."

"Is that your mistress—master's wife?"

"Oh, no; Madam is master's sister. She never goes out. Indeed, one very seldom sees her; for, when I do her bedroom she keeps in her parlour, and when I do her parlour she goes into her bedroom."

"How strange!" said Guy.

"Yes, isn't it? But she is a strange lady—a little cracked, they say; but I don't think that. She isn't cross or unkind, and gives very little trouble; although, poor thing, she seems to have trouble enough of her own, only one can't tell what it's about. She's a widow; so, perhaps, she's fretting after her husband, though she's young enough and rich enough, for the matter of that, to get another one."

Guy volunteering no remark to this observation

of the pert housemaid's, she addressed him again ; for she had no idea of losing the splendid chance thus thrown in her way, of having a little gossip.

She plied him with all manner of questions touching himself, his family, the mode in which he obtained his situation, how he liked it, and a variety of others concerning Tom and the apprentice Brand, and more particularly about the latter.

Guy replied to them all pretty freely, making only certain reservations here and there upon matters which he did not consider it prudent to divulge ; and, in return, he used, it must be owned, no scruple in making inquiries of herself as to all he wished to know about the family.

But with every desire to talk, and to divulge whatever secrets the house might have contained, she could add very little indeed to what he knew already.

She described Mr Bindwell as being a very irritable man, and excessively jealous of his wife—jealous even of her looking out of the window, or leaving the house for five minutes at a time.

The mistress herself was spoken of by Lucy as wearing “splendid dresses,” and always wanting to go out to show them ; for they kept little or no company, and she was not satisfied with “making herself fine” for her master alone.

The girl also described her as of comparatively low origin, and thirty years at least younger than her husband.

"And I suppose," said Guy, "he's afraid she'll fly away from him over the roof, and that's why he keeps your window so barred up."

"Perhaps it is," answered the girl, "unless," she added slyly, "he's afraid some young fellow should fly in at it. But, bless me! I don't think anything of these bars; they're stupidly put on; just screwed in. I'd have them off in a jiffy if I wanted. My father's a carpenter, you see," she added, by way of explanation; "and, when I was at home, my brother and I used to amuse ourselves with the tools till we got quite dab hands."

A noise, which Guy fancied to come from his room, made him glide back swiftly to his window; but, perceiving matters to be all quiet there, he went back again to the young housemaid; for, although he was conscious that an intimacy thus begun was not precisely proper, it had a certain romantic charm about it which he did not feel, just then, strong enough to resist.

"It was nothing," said the youth, as he resumed his seat upon the slates.

"I'm glad of that," she answered; "for, if they'd found you out, they'd be after sticking bars on to *your* window, and perhaps would put in rivets instead of screws. Do they let you go out every Sunday, if you like?"

"I go out to church," said Guy, "and sometimes I get half a day to go and see a friend in the Kent Road."

"Are you going out next Sunday?" she inquired.

"I think so. Are you?"

"Oh, yes; it's my Sunday out. Would you like to take a walk together?"

"Very much," said Guy, who felt at that moment that he should, but an instant after repented having confessed so much.

"Well, then, so we will. And a nice long walk we'll have, too. Do you know much of London?"

"Very little, indeed," answered Guy. "I've been here such a little while, you know."

"Of course. Well, I don't know much, but I've been to one or two parts—oh, such loves of places! I went to Hyde Park once, and to Kensington Gardens. Ah! that is a splendid place. If it's fine we'll go there, shall we?"

"Yes, if you like," said Guy, who, though he regretted having given his consent, was too honest to draw back from his word. "What is there to be seen there?"

"Oh, all sorts of things. They've stalls outside on week-days, where they sell nuts, and I don't know what besides. But on a Sunday, you know, people sit in the arbours, and walk under the trees, and row in boats upon the pond,—for there's a big pond there, you know, full of fish—and drink curds and whey at the lodges; and it is so nice! with such pretty smooth grass, you know, and such a lot of ladies and gentlemen, all dressed so nicely."

Lucy was growing quite eloquent about the

charms of this "lovely place," and was ready to say a great deal more about its attractions. What she did say was sufficient to excite Guy's curiosity, and his desire to hear more; but both talker and listener were compelled, at this point, to suspend their conversation, for Lucy, after turning her head sharply round towards the door of her room, exclaimed to Guy,—


"Be off with you as fast as you can; there's old cook coming up stairs!"

The youth didn't wait for further warning, but gliding from his hard seat, with all the lithesomeness and quiet of a cat, he slipped through his own window in a few seconds of time.

He stood there and listened for a good half hour afterwards, but beyond a mumbling sound as of two persons talking, he could distinguish nothing; and as evening was now fast descending upon London, and making even the most gigantic of the chimney-pots dim and shadowy, he lighted his candle and resumed his book.

CHAPTER XVIII.


THE LETTER FROM HOME—REFLECTIONS—A CYPHERING LESSON INTERRUPTED—WHAT CAN IT BE?

REAT part of the next week glided by without any further communication taking place between Guy and Lucy.

For one or two evenings in succession he sat at his table with the window open, reading as usual, but on the alert for any signal that might be made in the direction of her room; no sound, however, which told of her presence there, awakened his attention; and he was far too prudent, fortunately, to venture to her casement.

His desire to know whether she held him to his engagement for next Sunday, meanwhile became very great; and although his curiosity, as we have already stated, was aroused to see all the beauties which she had depicted, he yet hoped that something would intervene to prevent their going, as calmer reflection convinced him he had been every way unwise to yield so easy a consent.

His thoughts took another direction before the week was over, and ran so strongly in their new channel, as to absorb, for the time, his whole mind and feelings.



The cause of this alteration arose from a letter received from his sister Sophy; and, as its contents relate to members of Guy's family, to whom the reader has already been introduced, and make mention of events to which it may be necessary hereafter to refer, we cannot do better than transcribe the letter in full:—

“ HOLLYBANK COTTAGE,

“ *August 18*—

“ MY DEAR BROTHER,—Your last kind letter contained such welcome words of your success thus far, that I should like—oh! so much—to be able to give you agreeable news in turn. But, alas! I fear that everything we shall be able to boast of for a long time to come, of a pleasant nature, must proceed, dear Guy, from *you*, as there seems faint hope, indeed, of *our* supplying it.

“ It is not that we have cause to complain of our bodily health. That, thank God, remains in the same state as when you left us; but, as regards our peace, our comfort,—I will not even speak of *happiness*—those, I fear, have abandoned us entirely.

“ I did not intend, dearest brother, to begin this letter despondently. I meant, in return for your bright and hopeful lines, to say something of a kindred nature; but my hand has unwillingly obeyed my feelings, and I will not now destroy its work. You *must* know the sad news sooner or later. If I did not write it you *now*, I should be forced to do so by and by; for I have promised to

be the 'Chronicler' of home affairs, as you once called me, and it is my duty to record events as they occur, however sad and bitter.

"We are about, then, dear Guy,—how can I write the words?—*to quit our home!*—to leave the pretty cottage where all of us have been born—where we have seen such gladsome faces and passed such happy days—the home to which our father brought dear mother on their marriage, and told her it was a 'paradise' now that *she* had entered it!

"And if *we*, dear, fret at the idea of leaving it, what must be *her* sorrow—what *her* grief? I dread to think of it! and yet, she so bravely bears up against it all, and tries to console each of us in turn, while her own heart must be bursting with want of consolation, that I despise myself for my little firmness, and ask myself again and again if I am worthy of such a mother.

"But you will ask, dear Guy, how it is that we should be compelled to leave our home, and yield to strangers the land upon which we have grown up, and whose every shrub is as familiar to us as the faces of one another.

"The truth is more sad and painful even than our loss of home. Father has quarrelled with Messrs N——. You can guess the cause, so I need not explain it more fully. I wish I could as easily cast it from my thoughts as I refrain from writing it on paper.

"The loss of his position, therefore, compels us to

make a change. And that change is to be indeed a great one. Not only do we leave our house, but we are to quit Maidstone also; and the hope that we had of seeing you, at least at Christmas, appears now to fade away into the far future.

“Father has heard that there is a good opening at Portsmouth, and he intends starting within a week, so that we are already in the midst of the confusion which must always attend such a removal. My room is a perfect chaos. Every drawer is out and on the ground. Every chair is filled with things. Two boxes already open their huge mouths to swallow my wardrobe and little trifling treasures,—and the bookshelves you arranged for me are already empty and hanging awry.

“There is a crumb of comfort, dearest brother, in the midst of our *whole loaf* of distress. The house is *not to be sold*. It was father's first intention to get rid of it, so as to have money to start with. But the Firm, where he has been so many years, would not, in spite of their quarrel, allow him to leave without a farthing. They have acted generously—nobly, and I honour them for it with my whole heart. On leaving, they paid him up to the end of the year, and then presented him with another year's salary!

“He was much moved at this kindness, and I believe it has done him good every way. It has certainly prevented him selling the house. He intends to let it, furnished, if he can,—or have the furniture sold,

and let it empty. But the other great good it has done is, that he is kinder to all of us than he has been for a long time,—he has spoken, you know, more like the past days—and he has not *forgotten himself* since it occurred. I feel almost sure that it is this happy change which makes dear mother bear up so bravely. She hopes, perhaps, by getting him away from old scenes, that a new life may be begun wherein some of the former happiness will be repeated. Oh, how fervently I pray she will not be disappointed !

“We did hope that he would propose to write to you or tell one of us to do so. I even ventured, in his hearing, to mention your name. I fancied, from the expression of his face, some thought of the kind was passing within him ; but it went by, and he said nothing. Still, dear Guy, he heard your name—I’m sure he did—*without a frown*. Depend upon it, a *smile* will shortly appear upon his features when you are spoken of in his presence.

“And now, dear Guy, I must bring this long epistle to a close ; for my candle is burning low and my paper is almost exhausted. I must have enough left to express how fondly we talk of you, think of you, and love you. All send kisses—more than I can crowd into my space, for I must have enough left to tell you, dear, dear Guy, that I am your devoted and affectionate sister,

“ SOPHY RIVERS.

“ *P.S.*—Dear mother, who sends you her blessing,

bids me tell you she is too busy now to write, but hopes to do so before leaving; and I, dear Guy, will write you again directly we are settled in our new quarters. You may depend I will not keep you waiting long, for I cannot get a letter from *you*, dear, until I give you the new address. Adieu."

To say that Guy pressed this letter to his lips and shed tears as he read it, will be simply to prove what we hope our readers already know, viz., that he possessed a tender and affectionate heart, and dearly loved his home.

When he had read it hastily through, and had somewhat recovered from the emotion that its first perusal had caused him, he began to read it afresh, and studied almost every sentence it contained.

The portions relating to his father were those which most deeply interested him, and on them he lingered even longer and with more intensity than on the parts which spoke of the breaking-up of his home.

He rejoiced as he heard of *the change* spoken of by his sister, for he knew too well what that change implied; but, after these generous emotions had subsided, the more selfish ones began to make themselves felt.

"So!" he argued, "then they have ventured to mention *my name* before my father; and he has heard it *without a frown*. I suppose, since I left, although Sophy has not told me so before, no one

has dared to speak of me. But why? What have I done that they should look upon me as one *dead*, and whose name may not be mentioned for fear of the feelings it will create?"

This thought, when once it took possession of young Guy, caused him the deepest grief. His heart seemed rising into his throat; and he walked up and down beneath the tallest part of the ceiling of his room, with his eyes filled with tears, and a sensation in his brain as if violent screaming could alone give him relief.

At length he took his place in the window-ledge, where the air could play upon his burning forehead and scorched cheeks.

It was a dark and threatening evening, with occasional showers of a fine, misty rain, that came sweeping over the house-tops with every gust of a south-west gale.

A barrel organ, which was playing some popular air in the street below, occasionally made itself heard when a lull in the roar of vehicles was combined with a pause in the moaning of the wind.

Common as the tune was, and the instrument which gave it utterance, the notes struck some chord within him, and changed the current of his ideas.

"Yes, Sophy, dear," he muttered to himself, "he shall hear my name with a smile yet; and, more than that, he shall hear it with *pride*. It shall travel to him with the praises of strangers, until he shall

long to see me—to take me in his arms, as in the old days, and to give me his blessing!”

He was at his old habit again—dreaming, dreaming. Yonder background of dark cloud, slightly lurid below with the reflection of the city lights, was to him a curtain whereon the figures of his fancy came and vanished, and came again, and hurried to and fro, like the shadows in a phantasmagoria.

A tap at his door, followed by the entrance of Tom, soon put to flight these airy imaginings, and rent his magic curtain in twain as effectually as though a sharp instrument had been drawn across it.

Tom's errand, too, was of a nature to prevent most completely the renewal of such fancies. Guy had promised to give him a lesson in arithmetic, the sixth or seventh of a series; and, as they were to tackle that evening some of the intricacies of “reduction,” there was little chance of the youth being able to abstract his mind from that very practical employment. They had spent a good hour at the work, and were on the point of giving over for the night. The air proving chilly, the window had been closed, and it occasionally shook beneath the pressure of the wind as the gale swept down over the opposite parapet, and sighed and moaned uneasily among the roof-tops and chimneys.

The little table was just beneath the casement, and Tom sat immediately fronting it, with his heavy

coarse features, made less attractive than usual from excitement, poring over the slate.

Guy was at the side, with his left arm supporting his head, his sandy hair falling over and almost covering his hand.

His back was turned to the window; and, with a smile upon his face, he sat looking intently at Tom, who was labouring almost harder at dragging a few insignificant figures into order than if he had been shouldering a hundredweight of goods at a time.

"I can't make it out, sir," said Tom, at last, raising his head from the slate and wiping the moisture from his forehead.

"How is that?" inquired Guy. "Let me see;" and he put forth his hand to take the slate from his willing but not very bright pupil.

An exclamation of alarm, however, from his companion, made Guy again raise his eyes to Tom's face, which he observed to be deadly pale; while, with his mouth half open and his eyes staring wide, he sat rigidly gazing at the window.

Guy's looks naturally followed in the same direction; but nothing met his view save the black panes of the glass, with the glimmering reflection of the tallow candle on the table appearing in the centre.

"What! What!" inquired Guy; "what is it?"

"It was . . . it was there!" said Tom, trembling in every limb—"there!—but it's . . . it's gone now."

"But what *was* it?" asked Guy.

"Oh! . . . I . . . I don't know . . .
It was a face . . . two eyes . . . oh!"

And Tom closed his own eyes as if to shut out the vision.

Guy could only gather from this broken account that some figure had appeared at the window ; but being of a disposition which always prefers discovering a *natural* cause for any appearance, in preference to a *super-natural* one, he managed, in spite of the trepidation into which the change in Tom's manner had thrown him, to say with a smile :

" Well, Tom, I suppose it was a cat !"

Tom was not yet sufficiently recovered to be even indignant at this ridiculous supposition, so only shook his head, but with an air which resolutely rejected the explanation.

" Thieves, then, perhaps," said Guy, going towards the window, opening it and looking out.

There was no appearance outside of either cats or thieves ; besides that the latter, as Tom afterwards argued, couldn't be moving about without making, at least, some noise, audible to the two who were sitting immediately beneath the roof.

Guy endeavoured to gain from Tom, when he was somewhat recovered from his shock, *what* it was that he had really seen, which had caused his alarm. The account was not a lucid one, and was doubtless exaggerated by the fears of the narrator ; but Tom declared that, on suddenly raising his eyes to the window, he perceived a figure all in white, occupy-

ing the whole space of the casement, while two eyes, which glistened like stars, were peering in upon the two as they sat there engaged, and particularly fixed themselves upon Tom. That while he was staring at the apparition with all his might, it suddenly melted into air, "just, for all the world," said Tom, "like smoke."

"And smoke, no doubt, it was, Tom," said Guy, jumping at once at his own comparison.

"Not a bit of it, sir," said Tom resolutely, "no smoke ever looked like that."

"But you said just now, Tom, that it *did* look like smoke."

"Oh!" answered Tom, in that calm, logical manner that is so peculiar to mankind, when finding argument is of no avail; "that wasn't *no smoke*; besides, smoke hasn't got a pair of eyes,—like those eyes."

"But Tom, now," said Guy, in his most persuasive tone; "if it wasn't smoke, and wasn't a thief, and wasn't a cat, what do you think *it was*?"

"What do I think it was," said Tom, repeating the words, as people are apt to do when they are not prepared with an answer, and want time to find one; "Ah, that's another thing. I think, Muster Guy," he continued, dropping his voice to a whisper, and leaning across the table to his companion, but with his eyes still fixed, as by a species of fascination, on the window;—"I think, Muster Guy, it was a . . ."

But there, after looking warily round the room, he stopped short, looked a shade paler, nodded his head sagaciously, and added : " Well, never mind what I think. I needn't make *you* uncomfortable, Muster Guy, by telling you what I think."

" But you make me a good *deal more* uncomfortable by holding your tongue, Tom," said Guy.

But it was of no use ; Tom would say no more. The lesson, however, was effectually finished ; and as it was getting late, the two shortly after separated.

As soon as Tom left the room, Guy proceeded again to the window, which he cautiously opened and looked out.

All was silent and dark.

" Now *I* think, too," muttered Guy, as he stood for a few minutes at the open casement, " that it was neither smoke, nor a thief, nor a cat ; but a saucy girl, whose name is very like Lucy. But what a bold thing she must be ! And how did she get those bars away from her window ? I suppose she wanted to speak to me about Sunday.—Well, to-morrow's Saturday, so that if I don't see her then, there won't be much chance of our meeting. So much the better ; for I begin to think, if she's a girl to play these tricks, she'll be getting herself into trouble, and me too. But who'd have thought that Tom, that brave Tom, who doesn't care for the biggest man that ever stepped, and who wouldn't run away from three, would get so frightened at sight of a white dress and a pair of dark eyes !"

This idea led on to a whole train of others, which occupied some time in passing through his mind.

The procession was stopped by half-a-dozen clocks suddenly banging out the hour of eleven. Guy looked towards Lucy's window. There was no light shining there, nor had he seen any, indeed, from the first moment of his opening his own.

Should it *not* have been Lucy, after all!!

This idea,—he knew not why,—made him feel uneasy, while a sensation appeared at the roots of his hair, just as if ice had been suddenly applied to them. He closed his window, perhaps a little quicker than usual; bolted it with care, and found himself looking at it more than once, as he undressed and got into bed.

No cause for alarm, however, disturbed his slumbers.

CHAPTER XIX.

MRS BINDWELL—A VISIT TO THE "SPARROW AND POST"
—AN EVENING CALL—THE INTRODUCTION.

SATURDAY passed over and Sunday morning came without the slightest intimation from Lucy that she intended keeping her engagement, and without any explanation being given of the mysterious visitant that had so upset the equanimity of Tom.

Guy began to fancy that his humble friend had been the victim of a delusion, and ventured, when they were discussing it on the morning after the event, to tell him so.

Tom was obstinate, however, in his unbelief, and Guy refrained from pressing the matter too closely.

The youth kept on the look-out for the forward housemaid on his way to and from church, but without success. He purposely lingered on his return to give her a chance of seeing him, all to no purpose.

But though he failed in catching a glimpse of the maid, his watchfulness was rewarded by a sight of the mistress—or, at least, so he deemed to be, the gaily-dressed woman who, leaning on Mr Bindwell's

arm, passed him as he was slowly retracing his steps homewards.

Determined to have a good look at her, he crossed the road, and walking rapidly down the street, managed to meet them face to face as they were entering the private door.

Her appearance quite corresponded with the accounts he had hitherto heard of the lady. She was tall, stout, and handsome, with rather a high colour on her cheeks, which were shaded by ringlets of rich brown hair; but her features were large and somewhat coarse, and altogether, in spite of her rich dress of figured silk and bonnet of fine lace and ribbon, she did not, Guy thought, look "the lady." She appeared young enough to be Mr Bindwell's daughter, and she courted admiration as she swept along in a marked and decided manner.

Guy saw them enter by the private door, and then himself obtained admittance at the other.

Having already the day previous obtained permission to take a few hours' holiday, Guy, immediately after dinner, disposed himself for a walk to the Old Kent Road, where tea and smiles and a ready welcome were waiting him with Mrs Warkup.

These little visits were treats to both of them, but especially to the worthy landlady, who looked forward to their recurrence with all the eagerness of a schoolboy counting the days to the vacation.

It was astonishing to see how completely Guy had taken hold of her affections. It has been elsewhere

observed that the youth's appearance was so far from prepossessing to a casual observer, that some persons, on seeing him for the first time, might even exclaim, "What a plain-looking lad!" and that it was necessary to know him well before appreciating his character and qualities.

Through a happy chance that very plainness, by reminding Mrs Warkup of her own poor boy, had first awakened her sympathies in his favour, and when once they were gained, Guy's progress in her heart was sure to be great and lasting. Had he been indeed her own son she could not have received him more affectionately, or inquired with deeper interest into his welfare and comfort. That interest was displayed strongly before they parted in the evening; for, after questioning him for the second or third time, as to how he got on, and whether he was comfortable, she said, "Because, you know my dear, you needn't stop there another day without you like. This is your home, you know, where you'll always find your old mother with open arms ready to receive you."

Guy had indeed cause to be grateful for such love and such support, and grateful he undoubtedly felt. Still, we are all apt in this world to attribute to our own merits, and goodness, and what not, the success which attends our efforts and the happiness which falls to our share, and think sometimes even then that our recompense should be greater and our felicity more complete than they actually are.

Our friend Guy was no exception to this rule. Things appeared to be so smiling, and his success hitherto had been so easy, that he deemed the sun of fortune, which had just risen upon him, was to go on shining and increasing in power without a cloud to dim its lustre, and was unwilling to believe that skies so serene and promising could ever be blackened by a storm.

Need we say that he was grievously mistaken?

Although Guy Rivers fell into the common error of overrating his own excellence, he had really too much good sense to allow so ridiculous a notion to prevent him taking his usual pains with any work he had in hand.

He remained just as attentive, and quite as industrious as ever; and, during the few weeks he had been hitherto employed at Mr Bindwell's, had made such good use of his time as thoroughly to master all the details of his duties, and to get a tolerable insight into the general working of the business.

Nay, more. Mr Ruggles' state of health was such as to render him sometimes incapable of application; and through entrusting to the junior clerk on these occasions part of his own work, the latter, from his natural quickness, became shortly quite as able to perform it as Mr Ruggles himself. It was precious knowledge that he so acquired; and, as it was his nature thus to glean it, before many years had flown over his head, he was in a position to endorse, from

his own experience, the great truths, that no treasure is packed in so small a compass as knowledge, and that no man shall say until he reaches the end of his career what sort of information can be deemed useless to him.

Guy was alone in his attic that evening, and the weather was as calm as on the Friday previous it had been boisterous.

Tom was absent, having been sent with a parcel to the other end of the town. Brand was also away, probably at his usual resort, the public-house. Mr Ruggles, who had rooms a few doors lower down the street, had gone into them until shutting-up time; and the old housekeeper was in the regions below.

The youth, therefore, was the only person in the upper part of the house, and had preferred sitting in his own chamber to the office, because it was a greater relief to his spirit to read his book in the quiet of his room, than surrounded by objects which reminded him too strongly of the labours of every day.

He sat opposite the window—which was open—with his head reposing in both his hands, while his elbows were rested on the table.

So deeply was he interested in his favourite occupation—reading—that he did not hear a pit-a-pat step come stealing along the leaden gutter; and so fixedly were his eyes bent upon the page, that they did not see a female figure cautiously approach,

peer into the room, and then seat herself upon his window-sill.

She probably would have remained there a considerable time without discovery by the studious youth; but, becoming herself impatient after a couple of minutes had elapsed, she exclaimed,—

“Well! some folks *are* fond of reading.”

“Dear me!” exclaimed Guy, starting up in alarm. But, perceiving at once the laughing face of Lucy, he concluded with, “How you startled me!”

“Ugh!” she ejaculated, in a sort of grunt, “you seem to want startling; poring over those books, just as if you hadn’t enough of them down stairs.”

“Well,” said Guy, “you see I don’t prefer them to talking to you;” at the same time closing the volume, and seating himself on the table opposite his aerial visitor.

Having sat there an instant, he said, “But how in the name of fortune did you get here?”

“How? why the way I told you I should, if I felt inclined; and I did feel inclined for reasons known to myself, and which, perhaps, I’ll tell you. A great stupid that carpenter must have been, to be sure, who put up those bars. Why, I got an old knife, as I couldn’t find a screw-driver, and had them off in a twinkling.”

“And when did you do that?” asked Guy. “I’ve been sitting here for a quarter of an hour, and haven’t heard the least noise.”

“How should you, with your nose in that book?

But I didn't take the screws out to-night. I got the bars off last Thursday; and Friday night I—"

"You came and peeped in at the window," interrupted Guy, eagerly,—for it was a relief to know it was she,—"and nearly frightened Tom out of his wits."

"Did I, though!" exclaimed Lucy, laughing merrily. "One would think he'd never seen a woman before. I suppose he took me for a sperrit, or something of that sort."

"A pretty solid one!" said Guy, as he looked at her plump figure.

"Don't you be impertinent, sir!" said Lucy, with a jerk, which nearly pitched her off her balance into the room. Indeed, but that Guy stepped forward to her assistance, she would most probably have fallen.

"Why didn't you keep your promise yesterday?" asked Guy, with a laugh, as soon as both had resumed their places.

"Because I wanted to go somewhere else," answered the girl, slyly; then said, while she looked still more sly, "with *somebody* else, that I shan't tell you."

"Oh, very well," observed Guy, with assumed indifference, "he's quite welcome."

"You say so, do you?" asked the girl; "but I don't believe you, for all that."

Changing her tone almost immediately afterwards, she said: "But I mustn't lose any more time here; I want you to come with me."

"To go with you!" repeated Guy, in a tone of surprise.

"Yes, to go with me," answered the girl, mimicking his tone; "that is," she added, "if you're not afraid."

"Oh, I'm not afraid, for the matter of that," said the youth boldly; "but where are we to go to?"

"My missis wants to speak to you."

"To speak to me!" repeated Guy.

"Bless the boy, yes!" said the girl impatiently.

"How he picks up one's words. If you *must* know, then, I'll tell you that my missis wants to see you to deliver a message for her; and you're to come with me into the house."

"Which way?" asked Guy, with surprise.

"Well, not by the street-door, I should say," said Miss Lucy, who seemed very ready with her tongue.

"Then I suppose you mean," observed Guy, "that we're to go in at the window you came out of. And how if my master sees me?"

"Oh, there's no fear of that. He's gone out to dinner, and won't be home till I don't know what time;—and when he does come, it'll be mighty little seeing with him, I should say. And cook's out, too, for a holiday; and Madam has gone to bed. So come along and don't be after losing any more time."

With that Lucy quitted her station at Guy's window, and began creeping back towards her own.

Guy hesitated for an instant. He felt that this strange proceeding was certainly wrong, but it had a sort of wild charm about it that interested him, in spite of himself. Besides, he reflected, that if he refused to go, Lucy would set it down to cowardice, as she had a little before hinted,—and the idea of being thought a coward by the young housemaid, was more than his youthful philosophy could bear. Before, therefore, she had reached her own window, Guy was behind her.

The removal of the bars was most complete. But the artful girl had taken all precautions against discovery on the part of a person casually entering her room. By means of an old fork, she had so enlarged the holes for the screws, that she could remove and replace them with her fingers, so that, after taking her stroll “upon the tiles,” she could return to her chamber, and, in the course of a minute or two, make the window as apparently secure as when first the bars were put across it.

Guy having been made to laugh at this cunning arrangement, although the explanation, to tell the truth, made him feel rather apprehensive of the girl who was its author, she showed him the way into her room, by seating herself on the window-sill,—turning round by the aid of her hands, as on a pivot, and letting herself down on to a chair inside, as soon as her feet had reached the proper place.

Guy, directly the way was clear, went through with a spring, and alighted on the floor with a bump.

"Don't make such a row!" exclaimed the free-spoken Lucy, "or you'll be after waking Madam. She's a light sleeper. I suppose missis is in the parlour, as I don't see her here. Just stop a bit and I'll go and see."

And with that she left the room.

Guy's love of order was somewhat scandalized by the appearance of the chamber into which he had been thus strangely introduced; the more, as he called to mind the neatness, cleanliness, and pretty arrangement of his sisters' rooms at home.

It was true that the class of life was a different one, but Guy thought that even a housemaid, and particularly so pretty a one, could hang or fold up her dresses instead of heaping them anyhow upon a chair or box, and might wash the covers upon the chest of drawers and table, even if she had to dry them upon the tiles, rather than let them get black with grease and soot. Dried anyhow and anywhere, they would be better, he considered, than left as they were. He thought also, that one or two articles he saw carelessly heaped together, would not be injured,—but the reverse,—by the application of a needle and thread as well as a little soap.

If Lucy could have divined his thoughts, she would, perhaps, have called him, as his sisters at home were apt to do, "the old bachelor," with the addition of a little stronger language; but when she came back into the room, she gave herself no time

for guessing riddles, but, seizing the candle, told him to follow her.

This he did, according to her injunctions, with all possible wariness, in order to make no noise while passing the various doors. The task was comparatively easy, for the stairs themselves were solid, and uttered no creaking sound, and they were, moreover, covered with a thick carpet and stair-cloth, which most effectually deadened the foot-fall.

Lucy, in dumb show, recommended even stricter silence on reaching the second floor,—as it contained the apartments occupied by Madam, Mr Bindwell's sister; and still descending, they reached the first storey, where she tapped at one of the broad doors that appeared upon the landing.

Guy heard the usual exclamation of, "Come in," with more trepidation than was consonant with his nature, which was of too firm a kind to take alarm at trifles. But somehow, he felt that the whole affair was not right, and therefore had not a clear conscience in what he was about.


He had tried to satisfy his scruples at first, by arguing that, after all, it was to obey his master's wife that he had taken this step, and it was to do her pleasure that he had entered his master's dwelling. But although he would fain have believed in the cogency of his reasoning, he found, in spite of himself, a score of objections to his own argument; and as he stood for those few seconds upon the soft mat at the parlour-door, waiting with Lucy for per-

mission to enter, he heartily wished himself back in his own room, and despised his weakness for yielding so ready a consent to the girl's invitation.

But it was too late now to retreat. The "Come in" was followed up by Lucy's opening the door, and ere Guy had a chance of offering any of his objections, even if he could find one ready to his hand, he found himself introduced into a well-furnished room, and in presence of the lady he had seen the day before, when leaning upon Mr Bindwell's arm, on their way from church.

CHAPTER XX.

THE INTERVIEW—AN EMBASSY—"LARK COTTAGE"—
MISTER SMITHERS.

" H! this is the lad, is it?" said the lady, on the entrance of Guy, under the auspices of the housemaid.

Guy made his bow, and then raised his eyes to the speaker.

She certainly was very handsome. Her eyes, of a dark hazel, were shaded with long lashes, and evenly set beneath regular and well-defined eyebrows, and her white forehead looked the more dazzling from its contrast with the rosy colour of her cheeks and the glossy brown of her profuse curls.

But there was nothing refined or delicate in her appearance, manner, or voice. In person she was large and imposing. Capacious as was the chair in which she sat, she seemed to more than fill it; and when she moved and spoke, it was in an abrupt and masculine way, that could not certainly be called winning.

Guy observed all this in the course of his conversation with her, and would fain have examined with

equal attention the room in which he stood, for it looked at once rich and comfortable in its decorations and furniture; but, besides that the four candles on the table only allowed a good view of the lady herself, Guy's attention was kept so employed during the short interview that he had no opportunity of getting a minute survey.

"Yes, ma'am," said Lucy in a pert tone, in reply to Mrs Bindwell's interrogative remark, "this is young Mr Guy Rivers, master's new clerk."

"Very well, Lucy, that will do. I'll call you when I want you."

Lucy received the hint to quit the room with a kind of half-smile, and took good care, as she did so, to leave the door ajar. Indeed, Guy plainly heard her breathing on the mat outside, while she listened to all that was going on within.

When the door had apparently closed, Mrs Bindwell leant forward to Guy, with her elbow on the table, and looking him full in the face, said,

"I sent for you here because my servant told me I might trust you."

"I hope you may, ma'am," answered Guy. "I always wish to do my duty to my master in all things."

This remark did not seem quite to satisfy the lady, for a slight frown passed over her features as Guy uttered it. After a little pause, she said, "Oh, of course, I don't doubt that;" and then added, with a smile meant to be irresistible, but which the youth somehow did not admire, "but what I want you to

do now is something for your master's *wife*, and not for your master. Do you understand?"

"Yes, ma'am, certainly," said Guy; "and I shall be very pleased to be of any use to you."

"But may I trust you?" inquired the lady.

"To be sure you may, ma'am; for I suppose you wouldn't ask me to do anything my master didn't like."

Again that same frown passed over the lady's face, and again it faded away. Guy thought the smile which followed it was forced, as she said, "I am glad to see you are so faithful to your master; it's quite right you should be. But what I sent for you about has nothing to do with him—nothing at all. The fact is, I" and there she hesitated a moment, and then went on rapidly, but with a little heightened colour, "The fact is, I want you to take a letter from me to—to a poor relation, and to bring me back an answer; only as my—my relation and Mr Bindwell are not on very good terms, I don't wish you to say anything about it to him. Don't you see?"

Guy saw no great harm in that; so he answered readily, "Oh yes, ma'am, I'll do it with pleasure. Is it far?"

"Well, it is a little distance, for he lives at Bayswater. Do you know where that is?"

"No, ma'am, but I dare say I'll find it out."

"That's right," said the lady, this time with a genuine smile, adding, "and I shall not forget to give you something for your trouble."

"Oh, I don't want that, ma'am," said Guy; "I'd much rather do it without. But there's one thing—if it's so far, how am I to get time enough to do it in?"


The lady at once suggested that he should get permission to go out for a few hours early on the following evening, when he would be able to get back in time to deliver his message before he went to bed.

This being arranged, the letter was put into his hands, with many cautions not to let it be seen by anybody until he delivered it to the person for whom it was intended. He was particularly warned not to mention to a living soul that he had ever been into the house, or been sent of an errand by any person in it; and, above all, not even to notice or recognise her if by any chance he should meet her in the street.

The necessary promises having been duly made, for young Guy saw no great harm at the time in acceding to her wishes, Lucy was summoned to serve him with some cake and wine.

The quickness with which the maid answered the bell proved to Guy that she could not have been very far off; and he was confirmed in this notion a few moments after, on leaving the room, for when he refused to reveal to her anything of what had passed between her mistress and himself, she said, in her usual free and easy way,

"Well, young man, I dare say I know as much as you could tell me, so you may keep your *secrets*"



("secrets" being pronounced with a jerk of her nose and chin into the air),—"you may keep your *secrets*, I say, to yourself."

"The secrets are not *mine*, you see, Lucy," explained Guy, in a persuasive tone.

"Pooh!" was the only answer which the pert housemaid vouchsafed to this remark.

"Well, good night, Lucy," said Guy, as he clambered through her window and looked back at her from the roof; "I suppose I shall see you again to-morrow?"

"Be off with you," she said, "and a good rid-dance;" muttering to herself as Guy crept towards his own room, "He isn't half the fellow I took him for—to go away like that, and not even let me see the letter!"

This closeness of Guy's evidently wounded her vanity, for she began putting the screws into their holes in a vicious kind of way, as if she required some vent to her feelings. Suddenly, however, before she had completed her work, she put her head through the only unguarded space, and called out to Guy, "I say!" in a tone loud enough to attract his attention.

"What is it?" he inquired, coming back.

"Why, if you've any message to bring to-morrow night, don't you think of coming near the window unless you see a white cloth hanging over the bars."

"I won't forget," said Guy; and with that he disappeared into his own chamber.

And when he got back, and all the while he was undressing, he thought and conjectured, and thought again, about the strangeness of what had transpired—the promise he had made,—the impression produced on him by his interview with his master's wife; and a variety of other matters springing, not unnaturally, from the events of the last few hours.

He took the letter from his pocket and read the address, written in a cramped uncertain hand—"Mister Smithers, Lark Cottage, Bayswater Road," and wondered whether Mister Smithers at all resembled Mrs B. He replaced it again with care, and began conjecturing how it was that Mister Smithers and Mr Bindwell didn't agree. As he could of course make nothing of that, not having as yet seen the person, his meditations took a different direction, and he found himself wondering why Mrs Bindwell had pitched upon him to be her messenger, and what could make Lucy tell her that he could be trusted, when she knew about as much of him as he did of Lucy.

This subject being one flattering to his vanity, occupied him a longer time than any of the preceding had done; so long, indeed, that he fell asleep with it still in his thoughts, and dreamed that Mrs Bindwell and Lucy, and Mrs Bindwell's cook, whom he had never seen, were all on their knees, thanking him for some imaginary service which he had rendered them, and that was too great to be thanked in any other way.

Guy turned over in his mind next morning what would be his best excuse to obtain the needful time required for so long a walk; for he had already discovered, by means of the map, the ground he would have to traverse to reach the Bayswater Road.

Good luck, as he chose then to deem it, relieved him of his perplexity; for he was far too honest to think of inventing an untruth, and he was apprehensive that he could not get away without giving a reason for his request.

A small parcel had to be delivered at the farther extremity of Oxford Street, and Guy at once requested permission to take it, as he wanted a walk in that direction.

Mr Ruggles complied without difficulty, and directly after tea the youth set out.

The part of London to which he directed his steps, although far from wearing the appearance of wealth and grandeur which now distinguishes the locality, was still so fine and airy in comparison with the more confined part of the town where he resided, that young Guy was struck with astonishment and admiration.

He lingered for a few minutes with delight, to see the carriages roll past him, filled with richly-dressed ladies; and he was alike astonished and charmed with the numbers of ladies and gentlemen on horseback and on foot, who then, as now, thronged the roads and avenues of the leafy park.

Mindful, however, of his errand, he walked the

quicker when he could tear himself away, and found fresh food for admiration in the grand houses which he passed by in his search for the particular one known as Lark Cottage.

He had to search long, nor could any of the few persons he now met give him any information to assist him.

At a spot where the road got very solitary, the tall trees of the enclosed park being on one side, while an open tract of flat ground extended for many acres on the other, his attention was drawn to a dilapidated building, so covered with bills and stencilled advertisements, that if it had not been for sundry shattered frames, showing where windows once had existed, he would have had some difficulty to determine that it had ever been used for a human habitation.

What a strange thing, he thought, it is to see how quickly a ruined old house breaks out all over in "bills," when the life is gone from it! It is just for all the world like a decayed tree in the woods. As soon as the poor old trunk has ceased to put forth its leaves, the fungi and mosses begin to grow about it, until you can hardly make out the nature of the substance from which they spring.

Smiling at his own conceit, he was turning away to pursue his inquiries, when near a wicket-gate hard by, which led into an ill-kept market garden, he perceived, half obliterated by time, the words "Lark Cottage," inscribed upon a sunken post.

Guy thought, at first sight, that the cottage itself had disappeared, for he failed to perceive for some time anything that could be taken for a human dwelling; and when at length he reconciled to his mind that the long, low-browed, one-storey'd tenement which he discovered at the end of a walk formed of flints and cinders, was a real habitation for the shelter of his fellow-creatures, he could not help fancying that it had much more the appearance of extensive pig-styes, belonging to one or other of the mansions he had passed a little before, than an independent family dwelling.

From all Guy had heard of Mrs Bindwell, and from the judgment he had himself formed of that lady, he was induced to believe that she was of rather low origin, and was at all events of inferior extraction to her husband. For the same reasons, he naturally supposed that her connections must be obscure, and would be found occupying a poor position in life.

Still, in spite of these conjectures, he was not prepared to find any one of her relatives living in so miserable a hut as the one he had now before him. Indeed, he hesitated for some minutes to believe, with the name before his very eyes, that he had reached his destination. But at length, concluding there was no likelihood of two cottages of the same name being found in the locality, he raised the latch of the wicket-gate and walked in.

The appearance of the cottage did not improve as

he drew near to it. Heaps of rubbish and manure, which emitted a nauseous smell, were lying within a few yards of the dingy windows; and a pond, covered with chickweed, and that looked stagnant enough to poison the whole district, was scarcely further removed.

The windows themselves were so extraordinary a piece of patchwork, that, considered simply as an effort of patient industry, they were really remarkable. Originally fitted with diamond panes, scarcely more than three of that shape were now left in their places, the remainder, as they fell out, having been supplied with odd bits of glass, apparently from the forcing-frames, for many displayed those huge knobs or knots which are only used for the very commonest purposes. It was probable that this strange medley of odds and ends prevented the windows ever undergoing any cleaning process, for no hand could have been raised to polish them for many a long day, and the spiders pursued their natural avocations in each corner without fear of disturbance.

The door had once upon a time been adorned with a rustic portico, over which the "virgin's bower" and the jessamine lovingly entwined their slender boughs, and saluted those who went in and out with their delicious perfume.

The ruins of the portico stood there yet, but the latter had ceased to be an adornment; and the poor and ragged parasitic plants, ruthlessly dragged from their supports, could not even make their sweet

breath perceptible in the fetid atmosphere which prevailed all round.

Surely, thought Guy, as he drew nearer, the house must be deserted. No human creatures could live here and let the place so run to waste.

He did not perceive that two pairs of eyes were at that moment peering at him through the cleanest pane of glass, and were trying to discover his errand by a minute examination of his person.

Satisfied apparently by the scrutiny, the door, as he knocked at it, was cautiously opened, and a woman, about forty years of age, with a hard sallow face, black hair, and an exceedingly dirty cap, appeared on the threshold, and inquired his business.

"Is this Mr Smithers'?" asked Guy, by way of answer.

"And suppose it was," answered the woman, "What might you want with him?"

"I have a letter for him," rejoined Guy, "from a lady—Mrs Bindwell."

"Oh! she has written at last, has she?" said the woman, in a sneering tone. "Well, you may come in."

With that she opened the door sufficiently wide for Guy to enter; and as soon as he had done so, she carefully locked and bolted it.

This proceeding was not of a kind to make him feel particularly comfortable, more especially when he looked about him and saw the miserable state of the apartment.

The dirty boards were not only naked of carpet or rug, but were broken into holes big enough for the foot to pass through ; they appeared, besides, in many places begrimed with dirt, but owing to the dim light which found its way through the miserable casements before described, most of their imperfections were doubtless hidden.

The walls and ceiling had once been whitewashed, but the smoke of many winters, which had puffed out from the ill-constructed chimney, had dyed it of a deep dingy yellow.

A table and three chairs constituted the sole moveable furniture. There was a dresser opposite the fire-place, that held a few cracked plates above and a few dirty saucepans below ; and two doors in the room, besides the one by which the youth had entered, seemed to indicate the presence of cupboards, or perhaps another room.

The woman who had spoken to Guy and let him into the house, was not the only occupant of this uncomfortable apartment. Beside her stood a strong stout girl, with brown hair and eyes and ruddy complexion, in whose features Guy fancied he could trace a faint resemblance to his master's wife.

"So," said the woman, as soon as she had secured the door in the manner described, "you have brought a letter from Mrs B. Where is it?"

"Here," said Guy, pulling it forth. "But is not Mr Smithers at home?"

"No, he isn't," answered the woman, snappishly.
 "What do you ask *that* question for?"

"Why," replied the youth, "as the letter is for him, I should have preferred giving it into his own hands."

"And isn't it the same thing if you give it to me, his lawful wife?" rejoined Mrs Smithers, in a tone of great asperity.

"Well, I suppose so," said Guy, reddening, "if he is not in," at the same time offering her the letter.

The woman looked at him, while she snatched rather than took the letter from his hand, as if she were disposed to make another angry remark. Indeed, her whole manner impressed Guy with the idea that she was labouring under some feeling of irritation, that she could with difficulty suppress.

The mother and daughter went to one of the windows to read the letter, which the former had torn open; while Guy continued standing in the same place, by the table, where he had stopped on entering the Cottage, for he had not been invited to sit down.

They appeared to have some difficulty to make out the writing; for first one and then the other stumbled over an occasional word, and then a whole line, which was repeated half-aloud; so that, in a fragmentary manner, Guy was unwittingly made acquainted with the contents of the letter.

Those same contents were not of a nature to afford great satisfaction; for they went to show that the writer, however willing to be of assistance to her

correspondent, had so many claims on her purse as to be unable to afford him relief. Thus much was clear; and Guy therefore felt little astonishment that the woman, who was irritable enough before, should appear much more so when she reached the end of the note.

"I told him so," she broke out, addressing the girl, but giving Guy also the benefit of her discourse; "I always told him how it would be; and now, you see, I'm quite right. Encouraging that woman in her pride, indeed, and making people believe she was somebody, when everybody in their senses could see who she was!"

"Hush, hush!" said the girl, in a whisper, while indicating Guy, with a side-look, as though to restrain her mother in his presence.

Instead, however, of its producing the desired effect, it did—as is so often the case—exactly the reverse; for, turning full upon Guy, she exclaimed:

"And you, too, I daresay, have thought your mistress was *somebody*—and so she is; she is my husband's sister. Do you understand? *his sister*; and when, in the midst of his trouble, he sends to her for help, which he knows very well she can give him, *this*"—striking the letter with the back of her hand—"this is what she answers him, although he has gone about and never let a human soul, out of his family, know of their relationship, to save her feelings, forsooth—*her feelings*! Why"—continued the woman, with increased asperity—"she worked once

upon a time in these very grounds, and had to do her fourteen hours, wet and dry, with the worst of them, for all she's so stuck-up now. And little her husband thinks, poor man, who fell in with her after she had got a little education,—little *he* thinks that his wife has stood in these fields, hoeing and planting, with the mud over her hob-nailed boots, for all she can't now put her feet into anything but satin and prunella; but you may tell him from me, and you may tell her, too"

Guy had listened thus far with impatience; and had more than once tried to stop the torrent of words which poured so freely from the lips of Mrs Smithers, without success. But when she had reached this point, being perhaps a little out of breath with her own volubility, he interrupted her, by exclaiming:

"No, thank you, I shall do nothing of the kind. If you want anything told to either of them, you must write it down, and I'll take it, but not otherwise."

Whereupon young Guy seated himself in a chair, as if resolved to wait for the answer; and the action had so far an effect upon Mrs Smithers, that she said:

"And so I will. I'll just give her a piece of my mind;" and she sat down to the table with the intention of doing it.

But whether her anger gradually cooled; or whether, which is more probable, the labour of

effecting her purpose with her pen was more painful than delivering herself by word of mouth, what she committed to a half-sheet of paper was little in amount, and was not placed there without sundry consultations with the girl, her daughter, whose acquirements in the art of composition seemed upon a par with those of Mrs Smithers.

It was finished at length, and Guy, with a sense of relief, put the folded paper into his pocket, and with scanty leave-taking, stepped outside the cottage-door, which he heard locked and bolted behind him with the same caution as had been observed upon his entry.


He was wondering at this, and also at the revelation made him by Mrs Smithers concerning the humble origin of his master's wife, when a tap on the shoulder made him turn round in alarm; for he had heard no footstep near him on walking up the path.

A couple of men, however, then stood beside him, who, as well as he could make out in the increasing obscurity, seemed wrapped up, as if it were mid winter.

"You've just come up from the cottage," said one of them, jerking his head in that direction; "What's Master Smithers after?"

"How should I know?" replied Guy, "when I haven't seen him."

"Mind what you're saying," put in the second man, with a knowing shake of the head.



"I *do* mind what I'm saying," answered Guy, "for I'm telling you the truth. I went to give him a letter, and he wasn't at home."

"Who from?" inquired the second man.

"I don't know that I've any right to tell you," answered Guy, boldly.

"Oh, we can force you, for the matter of that," said the other; "for we've authority for what we do."

"Authority or not," returned Guy, whose courage had been roused by the manner of the men, "all I shall tell you is, that the letter was from a lady."

"Oh—it was for some gardening job," observed the former of the two men. "There's no doubt about it, Smithers has given us leg bail, for he's not about the place; so it's no good our wasting time here. However, we'll have him yet."

And thus speaking, the men struck across the fields, and left Guy to pursue his path to the gate, filled with conjectures about all he had seen and heard, and wondering why the two men who had just stopped him, should be so very particular in their inquiries about Mr Smithers.

He found an explanation, although a very unsatisfactory one, to this last subject of bewilderment; for, stuck upon the inside of one of the posts which held the wicket-gate of the grounds, he beheld a freshly pasted bill, headed with the ominous words, "FORGERY!" and following on with a "*Whereas, a certain WILLIAM SMITHERS—*" and a quantity of small type,

which was indistinguishable in the growing darkness.

Guy shuddered, and raising the latch with all convenient speed, walked with a feeling of relief into the open road.

CHAPTER XXI.

MR BINDWELL'S SISTER—AN ALARM—THE HIDING-PLACE
—A GOOD DETERMINATION.

NIGHT seemed to have set in during the time Guy had been detained at the Cottage, or, the appearance of the lights, with which the high road was bordered, made the upper atmosphere look unnaturally dark.

The youth hurried along on his way homewards, burthened with the thought that he possessed a secret of his master's wife's, which he must conceal from every one, and the possession of which, if known to his master, would probably cost him his situation.

Too honest and truthful to be diplomatic, Guy was determined that he would on no consideration carry any other letters, and he bitterly repented the having done so in the present instance, from a consciousness that the matter was one with which it was not his province to meddle.

Revolving these and similar thoughts in his mind, he at length, after great fatigue, arrived at 202, Fleet Street, and, having been let in by Tom, just ten minutes before closing time, he at once proceeded

to his room in order to get rid as quickly as possible of the paper sent in reply to Mrs Bindwell's letter.

Bolting his door, with a view to guard against surprise, he approached the window to see whether the preconcerted signal, showing the coast to be clear, was displayed from Lucy's room.

Dark as it now was, he nevertheless perceived the "white cloth" spoken of by that handmaiden, hanging from the bars, and looking singularly pale in the obscurity.

He therefore lost no time in making his way towards it, but found all in darkness within.

He began to think she had gone to bed, but this could scarcely be, as the window was wide open. He deemed his wisest course was, consequently, to sit down and wait for her coming, which proved a trial of patience, for a full quarter of an hour glided by without the appearance of a soul.

At the end of that time, a glimmering light was thrown across the chamber by a person with a candle mounting the stairs; and Guy, peeping with all due caution, observed it was Lucy herself, but looking somewhat pale and ruffled.

On his coughing to attract her attention, she came at once to the window, and, in a tone rather less pert than usual, said,

"Come in; I'm glad you're here, for we want a little help."

"What's the matter?" inquired Guy.

"Oh, Madam below, master's sister you know, has

had a bad faint, and we've only just been able to put her on the sofa; and I'm sure we can't get her into bed without somebody lends a hand."

"Shall I assist you?" asked Guy, whose curiosity was excited at the chance of getting a sight of the so-called mad lady;—"I will, with pleasure, if you think I can do so without being discovered. Where's master?"

"Out again for a wonder, and cook too. Missus took care of that, as she expected to see you. Have you brought her any message?"

Before Guy could frame his answer, Mrs Bindwell's voice was heard below calling, "Lucy, Lucy!"

"I'm coming, ma'am," said Lucy, taking a bottle from the mantel-piece, which she had been sent to fetch. "Follow me down stairs," she continued, turning to Guy, "and wait outside the door till I tell you whether you may come in."

With that she descended the stairs, followed by Guy.

The youth had not long to wait at the door of Madam's room, for, after a whispered conference between Lucy and some one within, the maid put her head outside and motioned him in.

The apartment into which he was introduced was furnished with much elegance; more so, indeed, than the drawing-room below, that he had seen the evening before. But now, as then, his attention was too closely engaged to enable him to make much survey.

His eyes were, on entering, irresistibly drawn to a sofa, upon which lay, in a death-like faint, a lady whose face, viewed by the light of a silver lamp upon the table, had more the appearance of some beautiful piece of statuary than that of a human being.

Her eyes were fast closed, but her long dark lashes cast a deep shadow on her cheeks, which were, perhaps, a little too flat, but tapered down to a chin of exceeding delicacy and roundness.

She was dressed entirely in white, with jet ornaments, while a profusion of hair, of the loveliest golden colour, waved in the greatest disorder over her neck and shoulders, and lay in masses over one bare arm.

Guy was so interested, yet pained by the spectacle, that he scarcely even noticed Mrs Bindwell, who stood beside the sofa, bathing the forehead of the sufferer with aromatic vinegar and water. She turned round to him, however, after an instant or two, and raised her dark eye-brows by way of inquiry whether he had delivered her message. At least, Guy so understood her pantomime, and answered it with a quiet bow.

"Now this lad is here, Lucy," said Mrs Bindwell, "you had better get him to assist you to carry my sister into her bed-room; for I must confess her weight is too much for me."

Guy could not help glancing first at the powerful frame of the speaker, and then at the delicate lady,

unconscious on the sofa, and thinking that if Mrs Bindwell chose to put out her strength, she could almost have carried them all. He, however, said nothing beyond expressing his willingness to assist as far as he could.

Whereupon, at Mrs Bindwell's suggestions, he placed his hands beneath the fainted lady's arms, while Lucy clasped her about the knees, and then, with slow and cautious steps, they carried her into the adjoining room, and by their united efforts, and after great exertion, placed her on the bed.

In doing so, the cheek of the fair lady rested for an instant against that of Guy, and struck so cold and marble-like, that it sent a strange thrill to his heart; and when they had laid her gently down, she remained so still and motionless, so insensible to all that was going on around her, that, as he looked pitifully on, he began to fear she was past all human aid, and that those closed eye-lids would re-open no more.

"That will do, thank you," said Mrs Bindwell to the youth; "wait in the other room till I come out."

Guy bowed and left the chamber, softly closing the door behind him.

On re-entering the parlour he at first seated himself in a cushioned chair and looked round him; examining, by the aid of the light cast by the lamp, the furniture and decorations of the room.

Having admired their elegance and semblance of

ease and comfort, his eye was caught by the appearance of a glass shade, containing some object which he could not at the distance make out. He, therefore, quietly rose and went over to examine it.

"What a strange thing," muttered the boy to himself, "to keep in a glass case!"

The object that called forth this remark was a child's shoe, somewhat worn, placed upon a cushion of black velvet, and evidently regarded by the care thus bestowed upon it as an almost sacred relic.

The imaginative boy, as he stood contemplating this article of attire, which could not properly be called either an ornament or a curiosity, began concocting all sorts of stories, with the little shoe for a theme.

He called to mind what Lucy had told him of this pale, solitary lady, and determined to take the first opportunity of inquiring further about her, as he felt a strange and growing interest in her life, that he could not account for or comprehend.

Returning to the chair from which he had risen, and still awaiting the appearance of Mrs Bindwell and Lucy, he opened a book that lay upon the table, at a place where a marker separated the leaves.

It was a volume of Young's "Night Thoughts;" and the gloomy style and tone which pervaded every line of the page he read, soon made him close the book with a kind of shudder.

As he did so, he perceived upon the fly-leaf the name of the owner, Blanche Lindell, most probably

the poor sufferer in the adjoining room, and on the back of it a few melancholy lines, written in a female hand in pencil, in imitation of the manner of Young.

While endeavouring to decypher the blank verse, for the words were not readily legible by the dim light, Guy was startled by hearing his master's voice below, as if he had suddenly entered the street-door by means of a private key, and who was calling for a light at the foot of the stairs.

The youth started to his feet, being perfectly conscious that he must not be found in that house by the man who had always so jealously shut every one out of it; for how could he explain the way in which he had got in without accusing others, or account for his being in that particular room without confessing secrets that he was bound in honour not to divulge?

All these things rushed through his mind with lightning speed, and at the same moment came the conviction, that he must escape without being discovered.

He rushed to the door on tiptoe, opened it with extreme caution, and hastily calculated the possibilities of slipping up to the top of the house unseen and unheard.

It was too late.

Mr Bindwell, impatient at having found no one below, had mounted already to his own apartments, and finding his wife absent, was ascending the flight of stairs leading to the very door against which Guy

stood, and was using rather strong language as he came heavily up.

What was to be done? He had not even time to warn Mrs Bindwell and Lucy of the circumstance, even if the doing so could have been then of any service. As a last resource, and when his master must have been within a step or two of the door, Guy threw himself on the ground, and crept beneath the table on which the lamp was standing.

He had scarcely thus concealed himself when Mr Bindwell turned the handle violently, and called "Clara" twice, in a loud and angry tone.

The sound of his voice brought both his wife and Lucy into the apartment. Guy, from his lurking-place, could only see the skirts of their dress, but he was able to judge from Mrs Bindwell's first words and the tremor of her voice how great was her alarm at this unexpected arrival of her husband.

He meanwhile had seated himself in the very chair from which Guy had only the moment before risen, and his foot actually touched the youth's knee as he stretched his legs.

It was clear to the lad that his master was under the influence of wine, — fortunately, perhaps, for Guy's safety, as he allowed himself to be soon pacified by his wife's explanation of her own and Lucy's absence, and shortly gave unmistakable sounds of his having fallen asleep as he sat.

The feelings of Guy, meanwhile, were far from being enviable.

When his master's foot touched him beneath the table, his fears of discovery were so great that a cold perspiration broke out all over him; and the constrained position in which he was forced to sit, made his concealment, physically as it was morally, a species of torture.

With regard to his hiding-place itself, it was perfect in its way; for there was no chance of discovery unless a person should actually stoop down to examine if any one were there.

The table was one of a kind now almost out of date, furnished with huge flaps that nearly reached the ground. As if for his better concealment, a cloth of dark baize covered the whole, so that but a few inches of open space appeared in any direction which could allow a view beneath. The lamp, too, emitted only an uncertain light, and was evidently waning through want of oil.

Mrs Bindwell, either from a desire to propitiate her husband's humour, or from alarm at the uncertainty excited by Guy's mysterious disappearance, did not again quit the room, but waited in a chair near her sleeping partner until Lucy again came in from the next apartment and reported Madam to be at length quietly dozing.

Guy then heard a whispered conference take place between mistress and maid, not sufficiently loud for him to hear, but which he judged must relate to himself; for Lucy, after a few moments, left the room, went up stairs, seemed to be searching about,

and then returned, saying to her mistress as she did so, "No, ma'am, nowhere!"

Another whispering then followed, which ended in Mrs Bindwell's gently rousing her husband, and persuading him to retire to his own apartment.

This was a matter of some difficulty, but she succeeded at last; and after several inharmonious yawns and sundry plunges when he got upon his feet, as if they did not too steadily support him, the two quitted the room, followed by Lucy with the lamp, in order to light them down stairs.

The door closed behind them, and Guy was left in total darkness.

His first act was to shift his position, for he was positively suffering through being compelled to remain so long in the cramped state which he had been forced to keep from the moment of his creeping into his hiding-place. He would fain have sprung out and stamped his right foot upon the ground; for the familiar yet painful sensation of "pins and needles" had seized upon it, and he felt impatient at being forced to bear it in quiet. He rubbed and thumped the suffering member to restore the proper circulation, and, meanwhile, began wondering whether he should be forced to stop there all the night, and what would become of him when discovered.

While filled with these unpleasant thoughts, he became conscious of a sound and movement in the adjoining room.

He suspended his employment of punishing his leg to listen.

The poor lady had evidently recovered from her fainting fit, but it was to a state even more painful ; for Guy distinctly heard moans and sobs issue from the apartment, and come floating through the dark atmosphere, in a mysterious way, that made his young blood freeze again.

His position seemed so much aggravated by these terrible sounds, that he felt he could not bear it much longer, and that discovery itself would be almost better than to remain thus an unwilling spy of some deep and hidden grief.

The re-entrance of Lucy with the lamp, and alone, appeared a relief indeed ; and he lost no time in communicating to her his lurking-place.

It was fortunate no one heard her barely suppressed scream, when he first called her by her name ; for, although she must have suspected he was hiding somewhere, she had not presence of mind enough to restrain herself at hearing his voice so near her.

"Come out," she said, "young gentleman, do ! a pretty fright you've caused us."

"And whose fault was that?" asked Guy, somewhat warmly.

"Hush !" exclaimed Lucy, putting her finger to her lips ; "here's missis !"

Mrs Bindwell entered a moment afterwards, and Guy could see at once by her face how great had been her agitation, for every vestige of colour had

fled her cheeks as completely as if she had passed some whitening powder over them.

She seemed immensely relieved at discovering Guy, and on hearing Lucy's whispered explanation of where he had been concealed. Motioning him to come up stairs, they all three cautiously mounted to the maid's room, where Mrs Bindwell at once asked Guy the particulars of his errand.

These he gave in a few words, for he had not yet recovered the fright which the events of the last half hour had caused him, and presented to her the paper sent in reply to her letter.

She compressed her lips as she read it, and then said,—

“Lucy shall give you an answer to take back to-morrow evening.”


Guy's heart beat almost audibly as she pronounced these words; but he had made up his mind, and was determined that no persuasion should induce him to alter it.

Assuming then as calm and gentle a tone as his conflicting feelings would allow him, he said,—

“Excuse me, ma'am; I should be — should be very glad to serve you, but—I must not—and I can't carry any more messages.”

The lady regarded him from head to foot with a glance, in which anger and astonishment were both discernible.

A few seconds elapsed before she could express either, but at length she said, “What do you mean?”



"I mean, ma'am," said Guy, who had now broken the ice, and was gradually recovering his self-possession, "I mean, ma'am, only what I say. I cannot take any more messages. I'm sorry to disoblige you, but I feel that it's wrong; and, if I hadn't felt it before, I should think so now, after what I've gone through."

"But that was an accident," said the lady, almost persuasively, for she evidently did not like losing her messenger. "Here," taking a half-crown from her pocket, and offering it to the youth, "here is money for you; you needn't come into the house any more; Lucy shall give you the letters; here, take this."

Guy shook his head and put up his hand by way of refusal.

"No, thank you, ma'am; keep your money. I refuse to carry any more messages, because I'm sure it's wrong; and no money, therefore, can persuade me to do it. Don't ask me, then, any more, because *I'm determined.*"

Guy said this with such an emphasis, and his strong features expressed so fully that what he said he meant, that Mrs Bindwell perceived the case was hopeless.

"Oh, very well," she said, in a tone that was intended to be indifferent, but through which the least observant could discover traces both of alarm and of vexation; "so I suppose you have also determined to confess everything to your master?"

To this Guy answered quickly and almost indignantly,—

“No, ma’am; I’m sorry you should say that, and I hope you don’t think so. If I can’t do what you wish, that’s no reason why I should be a sneak and a tell-tale. I never was called by either name yet, and I don’t want to earn them now.”

At this moment a noise, as of a chair moving below, startled them all.

Mrs Bindwell hurried to the door, and, listening for a moment said,—

“Perhaps you’ll think better of it by and by; if so, tell Lucy!” and with that she left the room.

“A nice young man *you* are,” said Lucy, as Guy was walking towards the window. “You’ll make a many friends in the world, you will, if you go on at this rate. But come, tell us what was written on that paper?”

“I shouldn’t tell you, Lucy, if I knew; but I didn’t look at it.”

“Oh! that’s a good ’un. Do you mean to tell me that you didn’t read what was written on it?”

Guy by this time was on the window-sill.

“I tell you,” he said, “the exact truth. I put it in my pocket just as I would have done a letter; and I never set eyes upon it again till I gave it to your mistress. I know no more than Adam what was on it.”

“More fool you, then,” said Lucy, pertly, “that’s all I can say.”

“There are two opinions about that, Lucy,”

answered Guy, coolly, "and the one I hold isn't yours. Good night!"

Lucy didn't condescend to answer, but closed her window with a jerk, as if to show how pleased she was to get quit of him.

Guy did not stop to conciliate her, but crept quickly along to his own room, which he entered just as the various clocks of the neighbourhood began tolling the hour of eleven.

A strong smell of burnt paper and tallow combined, saluted him as he went in. He had left his candle burning, and it had consumed itself away.

There was no other in his room, so he was forced to grope about and undress in the dark.

This he was not long in doing; and, as he laid his head upon the pillow, he could not help thinking that the day had been the most eventful he had gone through since leaving home.

He would have thought so still more if he could have foreseen all the results that were to arise from it.

CHAPTER XXII.

A DISCOVERY—MR BINDWELL'S VISITOR—A MYSTERIOUS
INTERVIEW—SOMETHING WRONG.

A WEEK or two passed after the incidents described in the last chapter without any further communication taking place between Guy and Lucy.

The youth at first rejoiced that his strongly expressed resolution should have produced an effect so decided, that Mrs Bindwell did not even make an attempt to persuade him to break it; but with the common inconsistency of human nature, as the days went on, he would sometimes feel aggrieved that she should take no step to conciliate him or beg for his further assistance.

Not that he was less firm than before in his determination to refuse her advances, if they were made, and reject any bribe that might be offered to make him swerve from his duty; still, it was a little mortifying to his vanity to discover, after thinking so much of his capabilities and power to be of service, that she could do just as well without him.

When he had almost given up even considering

the matter at all, and had accustomed himself to the belief that further intercourse with the family had ceased, a little incident occurred that turned his mind again in that direction, and gave him fresh food for speculation.

It has already been noticed that since the evening of the quarrel between Brand the apprentice and Guy, a coolness had sprung up between them, which, from the total difference of their habits, was not likely to be soon removed.

Little opportunity indeed was presented for such a purpose. Although employed in the same establishment, they were rarely thrown together; and when business was over, Brand always managed to get out, and Guy either retired to his room at once, occasionally alone, and sometimes with Tom, or did so after taking merely a short walk by way of exercise.

A little while, however, after the last visit of Guy to the house, Brand showed an inclination to be more friendly, and once even went so far as to invite the youth to take "a glass of ale with him, like a jolly good fellow."

But Guy didn't drink ale, and therefore declined the offer; still, in doing so, he showed that his refusal did not arise from want of sociableness, but a desire to seek his pleasures in another way. Brand seemed annoyed at his ill success, yet it did not prevent him using his efforts to conciliate our young friend.

Things were in this state when the incident alluded to occurred. It was nearly three weeks after the memorable night of Guy's adventures, and the youth, when business hours were over, had taken a stroll citywards, in order to make a trifling purchase.

On his return, while passing old St Dunstan's Church, whose clock at that period displayed two huge figures, placed one on each side the bell, armed with a club to strike the hours, he stopped, as was his wont, amid a score of gazers, to see the giants do their appointed work.

A voice and laugh in the little crowd broke on his ear as familiar to him; and looking more attentively, he perceived the face of Lucy, as she stood in the front row of the curious spectators.

The half hour after nine having struck, the crowd dispersed, when Guy observed, as Lucy also moved away, that she was not alone.

But who was her companion? Could he believe his eyes? They were not usually apt to deceive him, but yet he thought they must be wrong; for, walking beside the saucy housemaid, evidently on good terms with her, was Brand, the apprentice!

As they strolled on together, with his face occasionally bent down to hers, and her merry laugh ringing even above the rattle of the streets, Guy experienced, he knew not why, a feeling of jealousy and irritation, and found himself muttering, in an almost insane way, about his wish "to punch the fellow's head."

Scarce knowing why, he followed them in their road homewards; and walking just far enough behind to keep out of their sight and yet have them in view, he saw them shake hands at Temple Bar—Brand turning up one of the courts hard by, while Lucy proceeded towards her master's house.

At the impulse of the moment, on the parting of the two, he quickened his step to overtake her; but stopped short on asking himself the questions, Why he did so? and if he caught up to her, what he intended to say?

He hesitated so long to find answers to these queries, that she meanwhile escaped, when, in a very thoughtful mood, he betook himself to his own door.

This discovery of an intimacy existing between Brand and Lucy, gave him food for meditation, that lasted him the whole of the next day.

It would probably have engaged his mind for even a longer period, but that a rival interest was excited by another event, which, for the time, divested the former one of its importance.

The afternoon of the following day found Mr Bindwell and Guy alone in the counting-house. Mr Ruggles was absent on business, and Brand only was in the shop; for Tom, as usual, was out with his truck delivering parcels.

The master and his young clerk were alike busy and silent. The former was examining his ledger, the latter preparing an invoice; and the scratching

of Guy's pen was almost the only sound audible in the office, beyond the subdued roar of the vehicles passing in the street.

Suddenly, loud talking was heard in the shop outside, Brand's voice alternating with that of a stranger, who apparently insisted upon something which the apprentice as obstinately denied.

Mr Bindwell walked to the counting-house door to learn the cause of the disturbance, and Guy looked up from his paper in that direction, for the same reason.

All that the youth could see was his master's face ; but that displayed so much agitation, alarm, and anger, at sight of some person outside, that Guy could not remove his eyes from it.

Mr Bindwell stepped back into his office, as though to escape an interview with the stranger ; but there was no longer time. The stranger's step was heard crossing the shop to the counting-house, while a rough hoarse voice exclaimed :

"You didn't expect to see me, master, eh ! did you ? But I've found you out, you see."

Mr Bindwell stammered some unintelligible words, and retreated to a chair, upon which he sank with the action of a man whose whole energies had suddenly deserted him ; while a broad-shouldered, swarthy fellow, with corduroy breeches, much worn, coarse stockings and boots, a velveteen coat, and a red kerchief, tied loosely round a hairy throat, stalked into the office.

Guy jumped off his stool to go to his master's assistance, for he appeared fainting.

The noise he made in doing so aroused Mr Bindwell; who, casting a hasty look first at Guy and then at the stranger, motioned to the youth to leave the office.

Guy obeyed; but in passing the apparently unwelcome visitor, gave him a steady and scrutinizing look.

The man was dark as an Indian, with hair and eyes of intense blackness. He had removed his hat to wipe his damp forehead with his sleeve; so the youth had a good view of his countenance.

Somehow, it struck him as not unfamiliar, although he could not at the moment recall where, or under what circumstances, he had seen it.

"It must have been at home, down in the country," he thought, as he quitted the office and closed the door.

Brand was in the shop, and received him with an eager inquiry.

"Who can that fellow be, Rivers?" he asked—"a precious rum customer for *this* shop, I will say. I never saw such a one here before."

"I don't know," said Guy. "He seems to know Mr B."

"No doubt of that," returned the other; "and master seems to know him, and not to be very proud of his acquaintance, either. Did you see his look as the ugly chap walked in?"

"Yes. However, it's no affair of ours."

And Guy turned to the order-book, and began examining its contents.

"Well, if *you're* not curious," said Brand, "that's no reason why other people shouldn't be. Just listen how he's talking."

Guy made no reply; but he listened, notwithstanding.

No words could be distinguished through the wooden partition and glass-door; but the lads could hear the man's voice speaking in an imperative kind of way, and then Mr Bindwell's in a mild tone in reply, as if desirous of conciliating the fellow. Indeed, this was so evident, and it was so entirely different to the bookseller's usual manner, that Brand was in a fever of anxiety to learn the cause of this strange visit, and the secret of the man's influence over his master.

Under pretence of arranging sundry articles about the place, he kept as near to the office as he possibly could, striving, in passing to and fro, to get a peep at what was going on; and at last, being unable to bear the suspense any longer, he procured the shop ladder, which he set against an upper shelf, in order to obtain a view of the interior of the counting-house, while reaching down some unrequred parcel.

This project was, however, defeated almost as soon as conceived; for, while the steps were in his hand, the voices ceased, the door opened, and

the man, with his hat stuck on one side of his head, his right hand in his pocket, and an expression of triumph upon his coarse and swarthy features, stalked out and made his way to the street.

He was followed by the looks of both the lads, who were, from different motives, curious to learn his errand, and the connection between so low a fellow and the wealthy tradesman.

But he paid no more attention to them than if they had been piles of books. Evidently satisfied with his errand, whatever that might be, he was going his way, when, on stepping into the street, he ran full butt against Tom, who, dizzied with the sun, did not observe him coming.

The fellow uttered a deep oath as he put his hand to his mouth, where Tom's head had just caught him. The porter made an apology for the accident, but stopped in the middle when he heard the other's ungracious words; then, standing on the door-step, he shaded his eyes with his hand, and watched him down the street.

"Did you notice that man?" asked Guy, in a whisper, as he came up to Tom.

"I should think I did, Muster Guy," answered the porter; "and, more than that, if I'd ha' thought he'd ha' taken my 'pology so politely, I'd ha' bit my tongue off before I'd have offered it."

"You think, then, you'd know him again?" inquired Guy.

"Not a doubt of it," said Tom; "the world hasn't got many such ugly fellows in it."

"Oh, as to that," observed Guy, with a laugh, "the less you and I, my good friend, talk of that sort of thing, the better."

"Speak for yourself, Muster Guy, if you please," said the good-natured porter, with a grin. "But why do you want me so particularly to remember that black-looking chap?"

"Well, I can't exactly explain, Tom. One thing is clear; and that is, I've seen him somewhere, and I'm trying to recollect where. And . . ."

But there Guy stopped short, for a loudly pronounced "No!" from the office, made them both turn their heads.

It appeared that Brand's curiosity had been so excited by the visit of the swarthy stranger, that he was anxious to see the effect it had produced upon his master; and, therefore, after a little hesitation, had ventured into the office, and inquired whether he called.

The only reply he obtained was the monosyllable that interrupted the conversation between Tom and Guy; and it was uttered with such powerful emphasis,—Mr Bindwell jumping up from his chair in a rage while he gave it vent—that Brand left the room quicker than he entered it, and, to use Tom's expression, "like a street cur with its tail atween its legs."

Many were the conjectures and great the talk to which this event gave rise.

It caused the more attention among those who had been its witnesses, on account of the reserve, and even mystery, that hung over Mr Bindwell and his household.

Brand, who spoke of the matter very freely, and who made it, indeed, a subject of conversation for several successive days, indulged in the most extravagant notions about the "ugly customer," as he persisted in styling the stranger.

Tom would have it that there was a resemblance between the swarthy visitor and Mr Bindwell himself; and fancied he might be a brother or some other relative in poor circumstances, of whom his master was ashamed.

Guy, on his part, with the knowledge he possessed of Mrs Bindwell, believed that that lady was, in some way, connected with the stranger; but, of course, as he could not say that he had ever spoken to his master's wife, he listened to the ideas of the other two, and wisely held his own tongue.

As the visit was not repeated, and no other circumstance arose to keep it in remembrance, the event itself gradually weakened in interest, and after a week or so, the two ceased to speak of it any longer.

Mr Bindwell, also, shortly afterwards leaving home with his wife to pass a few days with friends in the country, his absence from business no doubt made the subject drop the more easily.

The apprentice betrayed, very soon after his master had started, that he had found another and more absorbing subject to occupy his mind.

His look was noticed to become anxious, his tongue quiet, and his manner absent and nervous.

He would often remain silent, and as though unconscious when spoken to ; and if suddenly aroused by the person who had twice addressed him in vain, he would start like a man who has not " wholesome thoughts," and who fears their being guessed by others.

He had been called out from business more than once by a young man somewhat older than himself, whose dissipated looks made him appear no desirable companion ; and on three different occasions had he slipped home after ten o'clock, and kept Mr Ruggles waiting ; for the chief clerk was too kind-hearted to lock the door against him, although upon the second occasion of his being over his time, he threatened to report him to his master on his return.

Tom complained that his rest was now often broken by young Brand's talking in his sleep ; and though what he said was unintelligible, it showed a disordered spirit, and was quite sufficient to disturb Tom's slumbers.

Little as Guy sympathized with the apprentice, he was sorry to hear and see such evidence of a mind ill at ease, more particularly as the lad had shown, as we have stated, a desire of late to be more friendly. After a little communing with himself, he, therefore,

made up his mind to seek an opportunity of drawing from him the cause, when a circumstance occurred, which not only divulged the secret, but made an era in Guy Rivers' own career.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A TEMPTING OFFER—THE PLAY—A MORNING CALL —THE ACCUSATION.

“**R**IVERS,” said Brand, one morning, as they entered the shop after breakfast; “I’ve heard you say that you’ve never been to the Play. Would you like to go?”

“Very much, indeed,” said Guy, who was rather surprised at the apprentice making the inquiry; and was even more astonished at the way in which he did it, for his lips quivered when he spoke, as though with some internal agitation.

“Well,” continued Brand, “if you and Tom would like to go, I can get tickets for Drury Lane; only,” he added, “as I want to give Tom the treat at the same time as you, you know, we must see whether he’s inclined to go, and whether you can both get leave.”

“I’ll ask Tom at once,” said Guy, in high spirits, at the thought of the entertainment; “and if he can, when shall I ask Mr Ruggles for leave?”

“Oh, for to-night, if you like. I can get the tickets when I choose.”

In Guy’s ignorance, Brand’s importance rose very much in his eyes on making such an announcement.

By what secret influence was the apprentice enabled to secure an entry to that "region of delights"—for so he considered the theatre—whenever he pleased? Had he mistaken the lad hitherto? and was he not, after all, a very superior kind of fellow, and that it was his own stupidity which had prevented him finding it out?

These and other thoughts rushed through his mind as he hastened to seek Tom, who was just as delighted with the idea as Guy himself; and, in order that no further impediment might exist which it depended on him to clear away, the youth proceeded immediately to the office to solicit Mr Ruggles' permission.

"I see no great objection to it," observed the head clerk, in his quiet way. "If the tickets are for to-night, it's of no use waiting till Mr Bindwell comes home, although he did talk of returning this very evening. But, mind! you mustn't be later than you can help; and Brand must let you in; for I don't see why the old woman should be kept up or woke out of her sleep, because you are enjoying yourselves."

"Thank you, sir," said Guy, in a perfect state of excitement; "Oh, certainly not; I'm sure Brand will let us in; and you may rely upon our coming home in good time,—thank you, sir."

And Guy ran off, quite radiant, to convey the news.


Brand appeared rather taken aback at the an-

nouncement that Mr Bindwell was expected home so soon. He even inquired of Guy, in a tone of studied indifference, whether Mr Ruggles had mentioned the time. It did not, however, make him less willing to obtain the tickets, when he heard that he was to let them in on their return,—but rather the reverse. “I shall be up and awake,” he said, “never fear it.” But a tremor came over him as he said so, and a strange light shone in his eyes.

Guy was too absorbed with the anticipated pleasure to observe either. His whole mind was bent upon the treat which that night was to afford him, and he counted the hours that must intervene before its realization, with the impatience of a younger age.

To understand this strong excitement on the part of Guy Rivers, it must be borne in mind, that he had lived, with the exception of the last few months, wholly in the country, where theatrical representations were scarcely known, otherwise than in the shape of “Richardson’s,” and other itinerant players at the fairs held in the vicinity of provincial towns,—or, occasionally, through the medium of a chance company of strollers, who hired a barn for the purpose of acting “Hamlet,” and a “Farce.”

At school, among his companions, there were perhaps one or two who had been “to London,” and visited “the Play;” and the exaggerated accounts they had given of the grandeur of the house, and the splendour of the scenery and dresses, excited,



naturally enough, a longing curiosity among their less fortunate school-fellows.

Since Guy had been himself in London, it had been an ever present wish in his mind to visit the theatre. During his evening walks, when chance led him by one of the brilliantly lighted houses, he used to linger, as he strolled past the open doors, and wonder what it was like inside : And, but that he did not choose to go alone, and was jealously careful of appearing to wish to steal away from work, he would, doubtless, long ere this, have asked permission to pay a visit to one of these " fairy palaces."

The pleasure thus desired was now offered him unsolicited; and so unexpected was the treat, that there appeared scarce time to anticipate it before it was in his grasp, for the dinner hour came quickly after the announcement, and tea appeared to follow rapidly upon its heels.

Tom, who was a great admirer of the drama, particularly where there was plenty of mystery, and noise, and thunder in it, yet seemed to take more delight in the enthusiasm of his young friend than in the entertainment he was himself to derive from the performance ; and in order that nothing might be wanting to make the pleasure complete, he had stuffed his capacious pockets with gingerbread-nuts and plums ; so that, after drying-up and burning their throats with the first of those edibles, they might have the satisfaction of allaying the sensation by the agreeable acidity of the fruit.

We need not dwell at length upon the various degrees of excitement through which Guy Rivers passed on this memorable evening, for many of our young readers will be able to explain them from the depths of their own experience.

Suffice it, that he waited with exemplary patience outside the doors, in the midst of the pushing and noisy crowd—he rushed round to his place with Tom, when the doors were opened, in the highest state of enjoyment—he made his entry into the body of the house, and took his seat with intense pleasure; and he gazed with a feeling of lofty admiration at the vast area, filled with human beings to the very ceiling, and regarded the splendid roof and glittering chandelier with wonder and delight.

But it was on the green curtain, whose withdrawal was to waft him to some other region,—to Italy perhaps, or Spain,—that all his looks were soon riveted. On each occasion of its being pulled partly aside by some one on the stage,—for not a movement was lost upon the watchful youth,—he told Tom, in a loud whisper, that it was going up. And when, after the orchestra had set his teeth on edge by the tuning of their instruments, and had restored them to their usual healthy state, by playing a popular air, in a dashing manner, the curtain did really, at a given signal, rise, not one spectator in the house was more attentive, more respectfully silent, more touched or more enthusiastic, than Guy Rivers.

The whole entertainment proved to him one of unmixed pleasure, and it was not till all was over, and Tom informed him that it was just twelve o'clock, that he could anyway conceive that so many hours had slipped by.

Tom, out of respect for his charge, resisted the offers of half a dozen acquaintance, to "take a pot" with them, as he came out of the house. Guy and he merely had a bottle of gingerbeer and a bun at a little pastrycook's hard by, and then proceeded homewards at a rapid pace, Guy's tongue rattling as he went, while recalling various scenes to his companion's memory.

They reached the shop at last, and rang gently at the bell; but five minutes elapsed without the slightest attention being paid to the summons.

Again they rang, and somewhat louder than at first,—but with no better result.

"Brand must be asleep," muttered Tom, "in spite of his boast. Let's try once more!"

They did try once more, and three times after that, but all in vain.

They began to feel uncomfortable, for they had already been a quarter of an hour waiting, and it had just begun to rain.

A violent pull at the bell, at last produced the desired result; for after some more minutes, the glimmer of a taper shone through the fan-light over the door, and a footstep was distinctly heard approaching it.

Instead of Brand, however, appearing to let them in, they were astonished to see old Susan, who had been aroused out of her sleep, and now showed herself to the belated pair, in an extraordinary costume, made up of all sorts of garments, hurriedly cast about her.

"Why, bless me, old lady," said Tom, "is it you? I'm sorry to have woke you up. Brand was to have let us in; indeed, he promised to do so. Where is he?"

"Oh, yes, it is very cold," said the old woman in reply, who hadn't heard a syllable of what Tom had said. "You needn't have roused me out either," she added, "for the door was only on the latch, and if you'd ha' turned the handle you could ha' come in."

"Or anybody else, for the matter of that," observed Tom. "Did you hear what the old woman said, Muster Guy? That fellow Brand has been playing us a trick, and while he sent us to the theatre, you may depend he's been somewhere else himself. We're home first, though, and I shouldn't wonder if it was I who had to let him in instead of his opening the door for us."

With that he lit his candle, and while the woman redescended to her territory on the basement, he and Guy made their way up stairs.

They both went into the front-room to see if Brand was there, but the chamber was empty. The apprentice's bed had not been lain on; and more



GUY ROUSED FROM SLEEP.

than that, some of his things were hanging out of his box as if he had hurriedly opened and closed it, after dragging carelessly out an article of clothing.

"That fellow doesn't mean to come home to-night," observed Tom, with a serious look. "I begin to wish, Muster Guy, we hadn't taken his tickets."

"Oh, we mustn't begin to fancy anything wrong," answered Guy. "He'll be home, perhaps, before we're undressed, and if I hear him I shall go down and let him in. So, good night, Tom."

"Good night, Muster Guy," said Tom, more gravely than usual.

"How suspicious Tom is to-night!" muttered Guy, as he walked into his own room.

A gust of wind, on opening the door, nearly extinguished his candle, when he observed the window to be wide open, the table beneath it pushed aside, and two or three of his books, which always stood upon it in scrupulous order, lying flat upon the floor.

"Some cat," he thought, "must have got in, unless Lucy has been playing me a trick on finding me away."

He was too sleepy just then to examine further. He closed the window, picked up the books, and throwing off his clothes, was soon in a delightful state of unconsciousness.

He slumbered on till a late hour, and would probably have slept longer still, but that a knocking at his window roused him.

It did not, however, do so at once, for the noise connected itself in some not unusual way with a dream that had taken possession of him, and a minute or two elapsed before he was sufficiently awake to discover its reality.

Then, indeed, he sprang up in his bed, and, to his utter astonishment, beheld his master, Mr Bindwell, and two men, outside his window, with their faces close to the panes peering in upon him, and occasionally tapping to arouse him from his slumbers.

As soon as he discovered who it was, although bewildered with the circumstances, and alarmed besides, for he reflected on his interviews with Lucy, and apprehended they were found out, he jumped from his bed, and hurriedly slipped on some clothes, when he walked to the window, and threw it open.

Mr Bindwell at once let himself into the room, followed by the two men.

He was covered with dust, as if just off a journey, and looked fagged besides; but beyond this, his features expressed great agitation, and his usually florid complexion was as pale as nature would allow it to be.

"How came you in this room?" was his first inquiry.

"I changed with Tom, sir, sometime ago."

"What for?"

"Brand and I had a quarrel, sir, and I didn't like sleeping in the same room with him."

"Ha!—hm!" ejaculated Mr Bindwell. Then he

immediately inquired, "Are you always as late as this, youngster, before you get up?"

"No, sir," said Guy. "I overslept myself. Tom and I were out, sir, last night. Mr Ruggles gave us leave."

"Oh! You were *out* last night, were you?" said Mr Bindwell, looking round at the two men, who, Guy observed, winked at each other.

The youth began, he scarce knew why, to feel more and more uncomfortable, a feeling which was increased by the mysterious manner of his master.

"And where might you have been?" asked Mr Bindwell, fixing his eyes full on Guy.

There was no more reason for his hesitating to reply to this question than there had been with respect to the former ones, but somehow he did hesitate, perhaps for half-a-minute, and then stammered out, "To the Play, sir."

"Oh! to the Play! Hm! We shall know all about that by and by. Meanwhile, finish your dressing. And you," turning to the men, "search the room."

Guy turned pale at this order, a circumstance which did not escape the notice of his visitors.

And yet, what cause had he to fear such a proceeding, or what could be discovered to his detriment?

"A guilty conscience," says the Scripture proverb, "needs no accuser;" and the conscience of Guy Rivers was not free from taint.

He knew that he had, on former occasions, done wrong—thoughtlessly, it is true, but still *wrong*, and he feared that punishment was now about to fall upon him for his neglect of duty.

Unknowing of any other reason for this strange and untimely visit, and this order to search his room, he suspected that his communings with Lucy had been revealed, that his interviews with Mrs Bindwell had been imparted to his master, that perhaps some calamity had arisen through the unknown message he had brought back to that lady, for which he was now to be called to account, and that his chamber was thus invaded for further evidence against him.

On this score, however, his conscience was at rest, and he saw the men make a survey of the room, without any increased alarm.

“I say,” exclaimed one of them, as with a thick stick he drew from the further corner of the room, beneath the bed, a bundle tied in a silk handkerchief, “What do you call this?”

“Something of mine!” exclaimed Mr Bindwell, seizing hold of it, and hastily untying the knot.

The bundle, when opened, presented to view sundry articles of attire, all of which the bookseller recognised as his property.

“How came this bundle here?” he asked, in a severe tone, turning to Guy.

The youth felt as if he were changing into stone.

His face blanched, his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth, and his limbs became icy and rigid.

Recovering himself by an immense effort from this painful state, and which the men and Mr Bindwell himself looked upon as proof of guilt, Guy at length stammered out: "I—I don't know, sir; I—didn't—believe me, sir, I didn't put it there!"

"Pooh! pooh!" exclaimed his master, in an impatient tone; "Who could have done it if you didn't? Officers, take him in charge."

This order, which one of the men proceeded at once to carry out, by laying hold of Guy's collar, was a sound so dreadful in the youth's ears, that it almost drove him wild.

Breaking away from the man with the agility of a fawn, he rushed towards Mr Bindwell, and throwing himself on his knees, passionately protested his entire innocence, and his being utterly unable to account for the presence of that parcel beneath his bed.

Guy's tears, words, and manner, carried with them such persuasion, that the very men whose business it was to ferret out and detect crime, and who were accustomed to see it in every shape, looked doubtful, and awaited Mr Bindwell's orders before again putting a hand upon the youth.

Mr Bindwell himself also hesitated.

At last, turning to Guy, who still remained in the same posture, he said:

"Do you deny that you knew of the removal of the bars from the garret window of my house?"

Guy covered his face with his hands, then shook his head.

"Can you deny," continued his master in a severe tone, "that you have been *into my house* through that garret window from which the bars have been removed?"

"No, sir; no, sir," answered Guy, sobbing. "But I never was in the house more than twice, and that was a month ago. Never since, sir; never since!"

"That is enough," said Mr Bindwell, turning to the men; "he showed the way if he did not actually commit the robbery. Take him off!"

"Oh, pray sir, pray sir, do not!" exclaimed Guy, in extreme distress; "I know nothing of any robbery."

"Stop a moment," said Mr Bindwell, as the men once more laid hold of Guy to lead him away.

A ray of hope warmed the youth's heart as his master called;

"Give me the key of your trunk," said Mr Bindwell, "and one of you stay behind to open it. Take the lad below," he added to the other man, "and wait for me in the office."

"Here is the key, sir," said Guy, drawing it from his pocket; "and you'll find, sir, that there's not so much as a pin in my box that belongs to you."

"We shall see," said Mr Bindwell; "we shall see."

And Guy, in the custody of the detective, left the room.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE PRISONER—THE LOCK-UP—A DUPE'S FATE—
GUY'S REVERIE.

AS Guy and the detective came into the shop from the narrow stair, they were met by Tom, who, ignorant of what had taken place above, was just going up to look after his young friend.

"Hulloa!" he exclaimed, as he observed the man, "who are you?"

"An officer," answered the other.

"What officer?" asked Tom; "and what have you got hold of that young gentleman for?"

"There's been a plant in the next house—I mean your master's—and this young chap's suspected."

"What, Muster Guy!" exclaimed Tom, indignantly; "what do you mean? Are you mad?"

"Not a bit of it," said the man, coolly; "at all events your master has given him into custody on the charge, and we shall have to walk him off to the station."

Guy meanwhile was choking with tears and shame.

It was very evident that Tom did not for an instant believe but that the youth was the victim of

some mistake, although, of course, this sudden revealment was a confusion and a mystery.

He followed the man and Guy into the counting-house, where the former had been ordered to wait, and tried to get some particulars of the "plant" spoken of by the officer.

The man, however, only answered his inquiries with monosyllables, and threw the worthy Tom into such a fever of excitement by his silence, and by his keeping Guy a prisoner without apparent cause, that but for the arrival of his master and the other detective, there was some fear of his committing personal violence upon the man, and forcibly wresting his young friend from his custody.

"Where to?" asked the man of Mr Bindwell, as the latter entered the counting-house.

"To the station!" was the answer.

Guy's heart leaped, but he kept down his tears with a gigantic effort.

"I ask your pardon, sir," said Tom, going up to his master, and touching his forehead with his finger by way of salute, "I ask your pardon, sir, but, please sir, why is Muster Rivers to be taken to the station?"

Mr Bindwell regarded Tom from head to foot, as though wondering at his impertinence; but seeing that his porter waited for an answer, and had the look of a man who was resolved to have one, he answered, almost mechanically: "A robbery took place in my house last night, and this lad is suspected of having a hand in it."

"But how can that be, sir?" argued Tom. "Muster Guy was with me the whole evening at the play, up to past twelve; and I can vouch for it, he was so sleepy when he came home, that he never turned in bed. Ah!" Tom suddenly exclaimed, as he struck his forehead, "young Brand! Where's Brand, sir? Has he come back?"

"I have not seen him," answered Mr Bindwell; "he is not in the house, but the officers are after him."

"All right, sir," said one of the detectives. "I shouldn't be surprised if we find him at the station when we get there; so, we'll go on, sir, if you please."

"Do!" said Mr Bindwell, with a nod, "and I'll come by-and-by."

"Am I to be walked through the streets like this?" asked Guy, finding his voice with some difficulty, as one of the men put his hand upon the collar of his jacket.

"Let the young fellow take your arm, Jem," said the other man. "I'll follow behind; he can't get away."

"If you'll only let me walk by myself," said poor Guy, half broken-hearted, but yet struggling against his position with all his might and main, "I give you my word, I won't attempt to run."

"And, more than that," said Tom, sidling up to the man, and speaking under his voice, "*I'll give you a shilling if you let him walk beside you without touching him.*"

"Honour bright?" inquired the man.

"Honour bright!" answered Tom. "I shall come on to the station myself directly somebody comes in."

He was as good as his word; for, before the men had reached the district station, Tom, having been released by the arrival of Mr Ruggles, rushed after his young friend and the officers, and was in time to hear the inspector take the charge.

The same officer, whom Tom had already bribed, allowed him to remain with Guy a short time in the lock-up room, as there was no one in it when they entered, saving one unfortunate individual, who, having been found the night previous in the gutter in a state of intoxication, was sleeping off the effects of the liquor on a bench in the further corner.

No one would have guessed, from the rough exterior of Tom, that so kind a heart was hidden underneath it.

He sat down by Guy; and, putting his arm round him, laid the youth's head upon his shoulder with a tenderness that brought the tears again into the youth's eyes.

After a few minutes, during which Guy's feelings gradually calmed down, Tom asked him the particulars of what had transpired up stairs, which the youth related as clearly and briefly as he was able.

He described his being awake out of his sleep; the entry of his master and the men into his room; the discovery of the parcel beneath his bed contain-

ing Mr Bindwell's things ; and the delivery of his key, in order that his box might be searched.

Tom's face underwent a variety of changes as he listened attentively to the whole narrative ; and, when it was done, he exclaimed, with emphasis, while he struck his huge fist upon his knee :

"Depend upon it, Muster Guy, I was right ; that fellow Brand is at the bottom of all of it. I see it all ; it's as clear as ditch-water : he got us out last night for this plant, and he's made off with the booty ; and he threw that parcel under your bed to put them on the wrong scent. Oh ! he's a bad un, that Brand !—a deep file is Brand !"

The words were scarce out of his mouth than the door was opened, and the very person of whom he had been speaking was passed into the room by a couple of officers. Tom, who was on his legs, and Brand, on his entry, looked with equal astonishment at each other ; for Guy, being seated, was as yet unobserved by the former.

Tom's first impulse was to seize the apprentice by the throat and strangle him then and there, for causing his young friend to be placed in so humiliating a position.

Reflecting, however, in time, that it yet remained to be proved whether the apprentice was guilty, and that the doing him an injury couldn't benefit Guy, he thrust his huge fists into his pockets, and exclaimed :

"What ! they've caught you, have they ?"

The apprentice did not at once answer, but sat himself down on the bench, and gave one or two gulps, as if trying to swallow something that was uncomfortably large for his throat.

At length, with a burst, he exclaimed, "Yes, Tom, the game's up! I've been a fool—an ass! I've been led on to this by a set of scamps and vagabonds, who've now left me in the lurch. But I'll be revenged on them, if I hang for it!"

Tom allowed his rage to have vent; and then, in a quiet sort of tone—for he felt sorry for the lad, after all—he said:

"If the chaps you talk about have led you on, the sooner they're brought to the hulks the better. Only, look you here, Brand; you yourself have been getting others into scrapes who are as innocent as unborn babes; and you can't expect people will pity you if you don't do what's right by others. Here's young Muster Guy, now! . . ."

"What! Rivers? What of him?"

Tom shifted his position, and allowed the apprentice to get a glimpse of the youth, who, with his head in his hand, was absorbed in thought, apparently indifferent to all that was going on about him.

"How came . . . *he* here?" asked Brand, in a hoarse whisper, indicating the youth by a movement of his head.

"Through *you*," said Tom, in the same tone. "They found a bundle under his bed, and they 'spect him of having something to do with the plant."

"I threw it there," answered Brand. "We were disturbed, and made our way out through *his* room, and I chucked it away because I'd too many things to carry. Never you fear, Tom. I can't save myself, I see that, but I'm not so black as you think me. I've had my eyes opened wider these last few hours than they've been for months. You may depend on me, and so may Guy there, that I'll tell no lies; and if I once get out of this . . ."

But there the apprentice stopped, for all the danger of his position suddenly rushed upon him, and made him silent.

And Guy! What were Guy Rivers' thoughts, as he sat there a little apart, with his dark eyes fixed upon a shattered spot in the stone floor?

Sad, sad, as a physiognomist would have read most plainly in his strong features and expressive face.

Was this, ran the current of his ideas, this the end of all his bright visions of fame and fortune? Was it for this he had escaped from the trouble of his home and the insults heaped upon him by his father? Was this the realization of those dreams in which he had indulged on the flower-spangled banks of his native river, and with which he had beguiled his mother on the night of his departure? Was it for this he had toiled on contentedly to the great city, and were these the bitter fruits of his care and industry? "I am innocent," he would argue, "and yet I am made to look as if I was guilty." But again,

he reflected, if he had not been so imprudent as to listen to Lucy, and be persuaded by her against his better judgment, he would have *no* cause to reproach himself, and would have no secrets to conceal. And then his thoughts would wander into a new channel, viz., what would be the feelings of his mother and his sisters when they heard of such a charge being preferred against him? This, however, was more than he could bear with firmness, and he buried his face in both his hands, as if to shut it from his view.

The door opening aroused them all.

"Now, then, young fellows," said a policeman who entered the room, "we must be after walking."

"Where are they going to be taken?" inquired Tom aside, of the detective, to whom he had before spoken, and who appeared at the door with several others.

"To Guildhall," was the answer, "where the Lord Mayor's sitting to-day."

"I'm glad o' that," said Tom, "for he's a kindly sort o' body."

"That depends," answered the man sententiously.

An exclamation from Brand made Tom turn his head, when he perceived the apprentice to be handcuffed, and safely secured in the custody of an officer.

Tom trembled like a child at the thought that Guy, too, would perhaps be submitted to the same indignity, for he feared the effect of the humiliation upon the sensitive youth; but, owing to some cause,

probably to instructions from the inspector, the youth was allowed to proceed to the place of examination through the crowded streets in the same way as he had come hither—that is to say, walking by the side of the detective who had first received him in charge.

Tom accompanied him to the door of the Guild-hall, and promised that he would not fail to see him in the court. Then grasping him by the hand, and bidding him be of good cheer, for that his innocence *must* come out, the worthy fellow turned on his heel, and went swiftly off upon some special errand.

With the disappearance of his trusty friend, Guy seemed to have lost his all, and to feel as lonely as a weed torn from the bank of a stream and flung upon the waters.

He held no converse whatsoever with his guard, who, indeed, appeared as little inclined to talk as himself; but, led by him into a chamber in the vicinity of the court, he sat down upon a distant bench, and awaited, in brooding silence, whatever fresh calamity fate had yet in store for him.

CHAPTER XXV.

EXPLANATIONS—IN THE TRACK OF THE THIEVES— ON TRIAL—THE TRIUMPH.

ALTHOUGH Tom and Guy were both alike ignorant of the particulars of the robbery which had occasioned so much stir, and in which the latter was actually suspected of participating, it is no reason why the reader should remain equally in the dark.

The details, as described to the court by a professional man, who attended on behalf of Mr Bindwell, when Brand, the apprentice, was placed at the bar, were briefly as follows:—

On the return home of the bookseller and his wife from the country at an early hour that morning, they found themselves unable, in spite of knocking and ringing till they were tired, to obtain admittance into the house, and were at length compelled, by the aid of a couple of detectives from the police-station, to effect an entry with a ladder at the first-floor window.

As soon as they descended to the ground-floor, after calling repeatedly to the two servants, Lucy's voice was heard crying out from the basement; and

on going below, they discovered that both cook and housemaid had been locked into the room of the former, which, being at the back of the house, rendered it next to impossible that their cries could be heard beyond the four walls.

The two women in a breath related their story.

They were supping together in the kitchen, when a rap, precisely similar to their master's, was heard at the knocker of the street door.

Lucy ran up stairs to open it, but upon doing so, three men suddenly rushed in, threw a greatcoat over her face, and before she could call out, or even struggle, entered the passage and closed the door.

They did not use any further violence, but walking her down stairs again, turned her and the cook—who was threatened with a dreadful death if she made a noise—into the old woman's bed-room, and locked the door upon them.

The women professed to know no more. In an agony of fear, they could distinguish steps, they said, walking about the house; but although they had been awake and listening the whole of the night, they had not heard the fellows leave the premises, from which they concluded that they must still be somewhere in the house.

On learning this, the two officers and Mr Bindwell cautiously returned up stairs, leaving the mistress and her servants below.

The first floor, containing Mr Bindwell's parlours, had been thoroughly sacked, everything of value of

a small and portable nature being carried away, and the whole place appearing in the utmost confusion.

Proceeding to the second floor, which were the apartments occupied by Mrs L., the sister of Mr Bindwell, they found that lady locked in her own room, where she fortunately happened to be at the time the thieves entered; for it is probable, if she had seen them make an entry, the alarm would, in her delicate state, have been serious, if not fatal to her. This circumstance had also saved her property, for she had jewellery, and even money, to a certain amount, in a casket beside her bed. As it was, the thieves had ransacked the sitting-room, and then at once proceeded up stairs.

If they did not prove so fortunate in their forage in the bed-rooms as they anticipated, the failure clearly did not arise from any want of neglect or perseverance on their part.

They had forced open every drawer and box, and turned their contents in a heap upon the beds. They had searched each bed and chest, and wrenched away the fastenings of a wardrobe in their impatience to examine its treasures; and from the appearance of sundry heaps about the rooms, it seemed that they projected the removal of many things of a portable character which they afterwards refrained from moving away.

The traces of the robbers' progress were therefore abundant enough, but the delinquents themselves were nowhere to be seen.

The officers, still accompanied by the bookseller, whose feelings at this desecration of his establishment may be remotely conceived, then proceeded to the attics, which they rigorously searched for the concealed housebreakers, but again without success.

"They must have escaped by that window," said one of the men, pointing to the casement in Lucy's bed-room, and which, although closed, was not fastened.

"I can scarce think so," said Mr Bindwell, "for it is barred with iron."

One of the detectives opened the window and looked out.

"The bars are removed," he said; "and here they are."

The man picked them up, as they lay upon the tiles where they had been thrown; and seeing the screws also scattered about, he fitted one of the irons into its place and tried the fastening.

"These screws, sir," he said, turning to Mr Bindwell, "have not been taken out to-day or yesterday, either. Just look at them, and see how they go into the holes. Why, they're a mile too small. Who sleeps in this room, sir?"

"The housemaid," was the answer.

"What, that young woman down below, sir, who told us how the fellows got in?"

"The same," said Mr Bindwell.

"Please have her up, sir, and let me ask her a few questions. I know her face, and I'm much

mistaken if I've not seen her walking about with a young fellow I've had an eye on some time."

Lucy was accordingly summoned, and although inclined at first to display a little of her usual pertness, she broke down after a question or two, and soon, amid sobs, and protestations, and tears, told all she knew, and more that she only suspected.

It was thus that a first suspicion was thrown upon poor Guy, for she explained that it was to chat with him that she had removed the screws. She then divulged the acquaintance that had sprung up between herself and Brand, who turned out to be the very lad on whom the detective said he had his eye. She related how they had met frequently of an evening and walked together; and how, on more than one occasion, the apprentice had been let into the house when every one but herself and the invalid at the second floor had left it. More than this, she confessed, that when the fellows made an entry during the night, she fancied the step and whispered voice of one of them were those of Brand.

Having elicited this intelligence, one of the detectives went off immediately to the station to give directions respecting the apprentice, for he felt satisfied, from all he heard, that the lad was involved in this affair, and could guess pretty nearly, from certain knowledge of his own, where he was most likely to be found.

"You may depend upon it, sir," said the man

upon his return, "he won't be in the next house, where you say he sleeps, but will be hiding now, and be after getting away to-night, when darkness comes on."

Having taken this measure, the officers proceeded to trace the course of the thieves, which they did with a cunning second only to that of an Indian when following the trail of an enemy.

They pointed to fresh bright scratches in the leaden gutter, where nails in a man's boot had grazed it in walking along. They indicated recent chips of the slates, which had been broken off 'on the same occasion. And they at length stopped before Guy's window and said, as they picked up a fragment of wood, crushed from off the window-sill, "This is where they went in, sir!"

And it was at this point that our young friend Guy was awakened from his sound sleep, in the manner described in the former chapter.

He was now to be aroused for the purpose of undergoing a yet sterner ordeal—viz., to appear as a prisoner in a police court—an ordeal which, innocent as he was of any participation in the crime imputed to him, made him tremble like a leaf at the mere thought of it.

Strange, however, to relate, when the time actually came, and an officer took him by the arm to lead him into the court, his courage seemed to rise and fresh vigour to run through his frame.

This change in his feelings produced a corre-

sponding one in his countenance, which was a great gainer by the alteration.

A slight colour,—that of excitement,—relieved the usual sickly pallor of his cheeks; the erect posture of his head enabled his clear bright eyes to be visible; and he had pushed back from his broad forehead the masses of fair hair which generally covered it.

He gave a hasty glance round the court as he was placed at the bar, but his look at that time settled on no one face with which he was acquainted.

He had no time for a second survey, as the Lord Mayor, in all the bravery of official costume, and which looked, just then, “awfully grand and imposing” in the eyes of the poor youth, suddenly addressed him, in this rather pompous style:—

“Guy Rivers,—for that I see is your name—you are charged upon suspicion of being concerned with others in committing a robbery in your master’s house,—hem! and it must be owned that your master was perfectly justified, under the circumstances,—hem! in giving you in charge,—hem! I am glad for your sake, to be assured that the accusation was, to a certain extent, groundless,—hem! as the unfortunate young man, who has just been committed for trial, has confessed that he, with sundry bad associates, were the guilty parties, and that you were entirely ignorant of the whole transaction,—hem!

“So far, so good,—hem! But there is one thing

which yet requires explanation, and we now seek it at your hands,—hem! In searching your box, there was found at the bottom of it, an article belonging to a lady residing in your master's house,—hem! and we desire to know what account you can give of its being there?"

Guy, who had listened with rapt attention to the chief magistrate's words, which he was too absorbed to think of criticising, lost his colour as if by magic, on learning that, after all, by some malignant fate, something not his own had crept into his possession.

Confident, however, in his innocence, which had been just before publicly acknowledged, and conscious that he had not *knowingly* appropriated the smallest trifle belonging to another, he ventured to say, in a voice which was as prepossessing as his general appearance was the reverse—

"And what, sir—my Lord, I mean—is the article you speak of? for I declare, sir, that I know nothing at all about it."

"It is this!" answered the Lord Mayor, unfolding and raising for inspection a small, cambric handkerchief, scarce bigger, indeed, than the sheet of paper which he had before him. "This handkerchief, marked in one of the corners in red silk with the name Ellen L——. Explain how that came into your box."

"I can do that, sir, easily," answered Guy, at once relieved and astonished, for he could not but ima-

gine there must be some mistake in saying the handkerchief belonged to the lady. "I can do that easily, only it will take me a few minutes to tell the story."

The Lord Mayor bowed his acquiescence, upon which Guy, in as brief terms as he could find upon the spur of the moment, related his adventure on his road to London, his halt at the spring, the arrival of the gipsy cart, the incident of the poor sick girl and the mug of water, and the interchange of gifts.

The account given thus by young Guy was made so interesting by his mode of telling it, that the deepest silence prevailed in court, and every one listened with an attention as great as that bestowed by the Easterns on their famous story-tellers. Scarcely, however, had the words passed his lips which told of the keepsake secretly conveyed to him by the suffering child, than a shriek from one of his auditors thrilled through the court, and blanched more than one man's cheek, while a lady, dressed in deep mourning and heavily veiled, was carried fainting from the hall.

In the midst of the confusion which this incident created, Mr Bindwell, whom Guy had not till then observed, addressed the magistrate in an agitated tone, and with a face as pale as his natural complexion would admit of,—

"My lord," he said, "I trust your lordship—is satisfied—for we—that is the lady, my sister—is

satisfied—that—the youth's account—of how this handkerchief—got into his possession—is correct;—and I therefore trust, that—your lordship will kindly order him to be discharged.”

“Just so,—hem! You have heard, Guy Rivers, what your master says; and I quite agree,—hem! with him in thinking that you should be set at liberty. And I am pleased to add, that you leave this court,—hem! without the slightest stain upon your character,—hem!”

There was a burst of applause at the conclusion of these words, which the loud calls of “silence” on the part of the ushers failed immediately to suppress; and Guy stepped back from the bar with a heart overflowing with gratitude and emotion at this agreeable close to his dreaded trial.

As he did so, a pair of capacious arms were thrown round his neck, and he found himself in the embrace of his good friend and protectress, Mrs Warkup; while Tom, standing near, slapped his leg and shook Guy by the hand, and wiped his face and walked about in a very ecstasy of excitement and pleasure.

“Oh, why did you come here?” asked Guy of Mrs Warkup, not knowing just then what else to say.

“Why did I come?” she said, in reply; “Do you think I could stop away when you were in such a taking? Directly this kind young man”—indicating Tom, who nodded by way of acknowledgment of

the compliment—"directly he came and told me what had happened, I only stopped to throw on my things, and toddled on here as fast as my old legs could carry me. I'm so glad I arrived in time; for I heard all the story when that apprentice was examined, and I knew, my dear, they would discharge you directly you came in. Only, when the Lord Mayor, he talked about something being in your box, I was in such a fright again, to be sure; I thought I should have dropped."

"But you didn't believe me guilty, mother, did you?" asked Guy, almost sorrowfully.

"Believe you guilty?" repeated Mrs Warkup, with a tear in her eye; "I'd as soon think of my own boy, who's now an angel in heaven, stealing as you. No! I didn't think *that*; but I've lived longer in the world, my dear, than you, and I didn't know, seeing the wickedness that has been going on in that house, what tricks they might have been playing you."

This conversation took place in the passage just outside the court, and the three then descended together into the stone-paved hall.

"What do you mean to do?" asked Tom of Guy, as they stood there on coming down the steps.

"Going home with me, of course," answered Mrs Warkup, who hurriedly forestalled Guy's reply. "You don't think I mean to let him go back to that Mr Bindwell's after such behaviour?"

"You see," said Guy, with a half smile, "my

kind friend here has decided for me; but really, Tom, I don't know what else I could do. I can never look on Mr B. as I used; and, besides that, there's something that has struck me, in this business, which I want to talk to you about,—quietly by ourselves, you know—and which I couldn't well do in that house."

"Perhaps you're right, Muster Guy," said Tom, a little despondently, "in not coming back again, even if master would let you, for you couldn't be comfortable there now; but I don't know how I shall get on without you." After a pause, he added, in another tone, "I say, though,—that lady—the one that screamed and fainted, you know, who's she?"

"Ah!" said Mrs Warkup, "who is she?"

"She's Mr Bindwell's sister," answered Guy; "didn't you hear him say so? and it's just about her, Tom, that I want to talk to you. Come and see me—to-night if you can—you know the house, doesn't he mother? Or, if not to-night, at least to-morrow. There's something that isn't right, Tom, in this business, and you and I will put our heads together to find it out."

"If we do," said Tom, with a grin, "I know which'll be the stupidest of the two, Muster Guy, and I needn't say it isn't yours. Howsoever, we'll have a talk, and I'll come round to-night if I can. So good-bye for the present. Good day to you, ma'am."

And Tom, shaking them both heartily by the hand, went his way.

Mrs Warkup and Guy went also theirs, lovingly together; for the events of that morning had cemented yet stronger the affection which had sprung up between them.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE AFTERNOON STROLL—MEDITATIONS—THE LADY IN BLACK—A SAD STORY.

GUY felt so much the need of air and quiet after the agitation of the last few hours, that on the return of Mrs Warkup and himself to the "Sparrow and Post," he partook sparingly of the dinner that was waiting, and went out for a stroll.

Wandering down the Old Kent Road, with his back to London, he came at length to the bridge that crossed the Grand Surrey Canal, a portion of which only now remains, the rest, which ran to Croydon, having been converted into the railway that now passes through the same district.

At the time when Guy reached the bridge, railways for locomotive engines and passenger trains were unknown, and the canal offered a walk along its banks, of great beauty and retirement.

And how thoroughly did he enjoy the solitary stroll, whose quiet was broken at rare intervals by the passage of a barge, as, towed by one or two horses, it slowly surged along!

The afternoon was singularly fine. Flying clouds tempered the sun's heat, and a gentle breeze stole over the water.

Summer had merged into autumn so imperceptibly, that but for the yellow and brown tints upon the foliage, it would have been difficult to guess that the year's prime was gone, and that nature must apparently die ere she could again put forth her young green leaves.

A belated bee still went humming past, as though it, too, had mistaken the season. A butterfly of mature years yet hovered round the dainty flowers. And the gadfly, in his suit of dazzling armour, hovered o'er the water, to gaze at his graceful figure reflected in the mirror below.

How dear to Guy were all these evidences of life, and liberty, and innocence! How sweetly fell upon his ear the lowing of cattle, as they grazed in yonder field! and how teeming with memories was the scent of each wild herb or flower that the wind wafted to him as he strolled along!

But the stern events which had lately befallen him, the hard and painful scenes in which he had been an actor, soon, in spite of himself, and in spite, too, of the scenery by which he was surrounded, drove away all softer fancies, and at length, again, took entire possession of his mind.

He ran over, with the rapidity at which human thought is accustomed to travel, every little incident that had occurred since his entering Mr Bindwell's service until the abrupt termination of his engagement on the morning of that very day.

He recalled to mind, with particular vividness,

that evening when he returned home with his message for Mrs Bindwell, and found the poor invalid lady in so terrible a state of distress.

And when once his thoughts got upon this track, how rapidly and thickly they came, crowding on each other in a way that made his head turn round!

He had now the secret of the grief that so oppressed her. He comprehended now why that small worn shoe was kept as a sacred relic in her sitting-room. She had by some strange chance been deprived of her child—perhaps her only one—and that child a girl.

And could that girl be the same, the very same he had met upon the London Road, whose ill and weakly state had excited so much sympathy in his mind?

If so, and there was reason to believe it, how strange the chance which had induced her, as if by a sudden impulse, to bestow upon him for a gift the little handkerchief marked with her name!—and how much stranger the hazard that had led him to take service beneath the same roof as her sorrowing mother!

But how was it that Mrs Lindell could have lost the daughter in whom she appeared so wrapt, that her absence was dragging the poor mother to the grave? And, again, how was it that the child could have come into the hands of the people who had the custody of her on the occasion of their meeting?

Had they stolen her? Guy had heard of such

things, but he could scarce believe they were other than idle tales. Yet in this case the story seemed a true one, for it could not be credited that the devoted mother had willingly parted with her greatest treasure.

And were the people kind to her? The woman was rough, but did not seem cruelly disposed. How about the man?

As Guy's thoughts fell upon *him*, there darted across his brain, like a vivid flash of lightning, a kind of revelation.

If the man had suddenly appeared *there* upon the bank of the canal at that very instant, just before him, he could not have seen his face more plainly than he distinguished it in his mind's eye. And it was the same face, feature for feature, as that of the dark rude stranger, who, a short while previous, had called upon Mr Bindwell, and excited so much food for gossip among the people in his employ.

There was no doubt of it—they were the same. The kidnapper of Mrs Lindell's child—if kidnapped she were—had paid an unwelcome visit to Mr Bindwell; and his first expressions on entering, which Guy himself had heard, were to the effect that the bookseller, doubtless, did not expect to see him, but that he, the stranger, had found him out.

Could Mr Bindwell, also, have anything to do with kidnapping the girl, his sister's offspring—his own niece? It looked very like it, else why his alarm

at sight of the stranger?—why the unnatural seclusion in which he lived?—and why, again, his extreme agitation when Guy related his interview with the child?

The youth was bewildered amid these various conjectures; and he found that, whilst pursuing them, he had wandered on and on until the sun was getting low, and he had some miles to retrace ere he could reach his old-new home.

When the consciousness of this broke fully upon him, he lost no time in quickening his steps; but night had fallen ere he arrived at the humble inn.

A hackney-coach was at the door, an unusual occurrence, for the class of customers who frequented the "Sparrow and Post" were not given to travel otherwise than by their own legs.

"I am so glad you've come," said Mrs Warkup, as Guy entered. "There's a lady up stairs been waiting to see you this hour. She came in the coach that's outside, and said she wouldn't leave without seeing you."

"Indeed!" said Guy, with surprise. "Who can it be?"

"You'd better go up, my dear," observed Mrs Warkup, "and then you'll soon find out."

The youth took the hint, and at once proceeded to the private parlour on the first floor.

Although there were two candles burning in the room, Guy at first thought, on opening the door, that the visitor had flown. A second glance revealed

to him a lady, dressed entirely in black, with a thick veil covering her face.

She raised it as Guy entered, and presented to his startled gaze the beautiful but pale and worn features of Mrs Lindell, Mr Bindwell's sister. That golden hair would have made her known to him even if he had not recognised the face.

She rose up as he entered, steadying herself by placing her left hand on the head of the sofa, while she held out her right to Guy.

"My young friend . . ." she began, as he took the small gloved hand she offered him; but she could say no more, for she dropped back, rather than seated herself again upon the sofa.

"Oh, madam," said Guy, "you are ill and weak. You should not have come so far. Let me get you some refreshment—a glass of wine . . ."

The lady shook her head, and summoning her energies, she exclaimed, "No, I am not weak—I will not be so. I will be strong."

She paused, and pressed her hand tightly on her chest, as if to command her agitation. Then she said, with forced calmness, "This morning, when you related to the Lord Mayor—the history of that little handkerchief, the account took me so by surprise—that I was—for the time—deprived of my senses. You do not, perhaps, know the cause. I will tell it you in a few words—by and by. But first—you must relate to me all you know. Something I have heard—but there may be more that I have missed.

I burn to hear it—yet I fear. But say,” she suddenly exclaimed with energy and a wild light in her eyes, “Do you think her still alive?”

The look and manner of the poor lady, her pale face, shaded with her golden hair, and set in the mass of black formed by her crape veil and dress, were altogether so strange and unearthly, that Guy felt a tremor run through his frame, and the recollection of Brand’s words, that she was *insane*, forced itself upon him.

He answered her, with caution, “I should think so, madam; but you yourself can judge even better than I, after you have heard the whole of the story you spoke of. Shall I tell it you?”

The lady looked assent; upon which Guy carefully described the meeting on the road; and in order that she might form an opinion whether the child was really hers—while suppressing the painful parts respecting her poor, wasted frame and emaciated face—he drew such a portrait of the little invalid as left no doubt upon her mind as to the identity.

A painful scene of agitation followed, during which Guy more than once rose up to call for assistance, but was stopped on each occasion by Mrs Lindell.

“No! no!” she said at last; “I shall be better presently. You have given me hope—hope! that has been so long a stranger to me. You must complete your good work. You have done much, but you must do more. Now, listen to me.”

She appeared to speak with so much pain, that Guy again pressed her to allow him to obtain some wine. At her wish, he procured her a glass of water, which she drank off eagerly, and, apparently refreshed, went on with better courage.


"When my husband died, I prayed Heaven to take me also, for that life would be a dreary waste without him who had rendered it so beautiful. My wicked prayer was happily not granted, for I had a child, an infant girl. She grew up beneath my eyes, and every day we spent together reconciled me to life. In her I lived once more, and I could look abroad again on nature without shedding tears.

"Nay, more, I could sometimes smile; and when enjoying the society of my darling child, I felt that there was yet some comfort, if not happiness, reserved for me in the future."

The lady stopped, made a long pause, and then went on:

"That too was a dream. I seldom or never went out alone, for my little girl and I were always together. But one day—one fatal day—in the spring of this very year, I was compelled to do so, upon a matter of business, and I had to go to a place where I could not well take her with me. I left her with strange misgivings, and twice I turned back to kiss her ere I went. I was absent but three hours; and, on my return, she was gone—gone!—no one knew whither."

Mrs Lindell here buried her face in her handker-



chief, and uttered a suppressed sob, while her whole frame seemed convulsed with grief and her efforts to subdue her emotion.

Guy felt deeply distressed, but had no words of consolation.

The sorrows of older persons seem so terrible to youth, that it is awe-stricken at the sight, and can only look on in silence, or shed sympathetic tears.

When the lady somewhat recovered from her agitation, she resumed speaking :

"I knew," she said, "that my sweet child must be stolen, and had not herself strayed away. The house in which I lived had a garden, with a back gate leading on to a common. In that garden, the maid told me, she had left her playing while she went up stairs for some household duties. On her coming down, my darling child was missing. The gate had been opened from the outside,—and—she was nowhere to be found. But near the gate was discovered, some time after, one little shoe, that had been dropped as she was carried off. I keep it by me now as the last record of my sweet girl.

"You are too young, my boy, sensitive as I know you are, to understand the nature of my grief at this loss, or the suffering it has entailed upon me. Look at me! But no! you cannot even tell by that; for you knew not what I was, nor can see the change. I have sometimes thought I should go mad. I know that people called me so; and at

last my brother took compassion on me, and brought me to his own house. He is my only relative, and he is not unkind. But I am so unhappy, that I grow suspicious of all the world—even of him—even of him!"

As she said this, some painful thought appeared to cross her mind and make her shudder, and for fully five minutes she kept her face hidden in her handkerchief.

After she had again recovered, to a certain extent, her calm demeanour, she addressed young Guy as if he had been a man grown, and prayed him to do his best to recover her child. She promised him that her gratitude should know no bounds—that half her wealth should be his—that she would advance him in the world and secure his happiness if he would bring back her daughter to her arms.

She said this, and more in the same sense, with such occasional tenderness and bursts of vehemence amid such tears and emotion, that the poor young man was at once bewildered, moved, and alarmed.

No wonder that he should promise her everything in such a case, if only to soothe and satisfy her; but more than that, he felt resolved in his own mind that he would keep his word.

"You may have to take steps," said Mrs. Linde as she at length rose to go, "which will occasion you expense—expense that you ought certainly not to bear. Take this," she said, offering him her purse, "and when it is gone, ask me for more."

"I would rather not, madam," said Guy, withholding his hand; "you can pay me afterwards, when I tell you what I've spent."

"Not so," she said, in a way which proved that she would not brook a refusal. "If you do not take it, I shall judge that you do not mean to be true to me. Of what importance to me is a paltry sum—is all my wealth—in comparison with the restoration of my child!"

The exaltation of voice and manner with which these words were pronounced, told Guy that he must not trifle with her. He therefore took the purse from her hand, resolving to convey it forthwith into the custody of Mrs Warkup.

"I shall soon see you again," said Mrs Lindell, squeezing his hand. "Never fear but that my anxiety will shortly bring me hither."

He assisted her down the stairs to her coach, from the window of which she waved her hand as it drove off.

It had scarcely done so, than the worthy Tom, in a great heat from the exertion of having walked so quickly, rushed up to the door.

CHAPTER XXVII.

NEW PROJECTS—A FRESH OPENING—TWO PROPOSALS
—NEWS FROM HOME.

AFTER the first greetings between Tom and Guy were over, each of them in turn unburdened himself of the load of intelligence with which he was charged ; and from the eagerness displayed in performing the operation, it was clear how delighted both felt to have a trusty heart wherein to confide it.

Tom listened with absorbed attention to Guy's account of the interview between Mrs Lindell and himself ; and when it was all told, and he had exhausted his catalogue of interjections and exclamations of surprise at the story, he promised the youth to join him heart and soul in his search after the kidnapped child.

He did this the more readily, as he, like his young friend, was, for the present, out of place.

It appeared that on his return to the shop, some words took place between himself and Mr Bindwell, through the marked interest the worthy fellow had displayed in Guy's matter.

The bookseller, from a variety of causes, not being in the best of humours, and Tom feeling somewhat excited by the events of the day, the few words grew into many, and they got warmer as they increased in number, until the irascible master, in a rage, bade him quit his house, an order which Tom at once proceeded to obey, by packing up his things and carrying them off then and there.

"He hasn't paid me yet," said Tom, as he concluded his narrative; "but I shall go up and see him to-morrow, when, if you like, Muster Guy, you can write him a letter, and I'll get your account settled at the same time."

This being agreed, they sat down to supper with Mrs Warkup, and were all three very chatty indeed round that little table in the bar-parlour. As to Mrs Warkup, she was in the highest possible spirits, for she had got her favourite back again, and hugged herself with the idea that they were not to separate for some time to come.

When the cloth was removed, and the two friends were left in the room alone, their tongues went faster still, and many were the plans they formed for the future, and abundant were the remarks they made upon the events just past.

Before they separated for the night—Tom had secured a bed in the neighbourhood—they came to the conclusion, that as the gipsy, in whose keeping Guy had observed little Ellen, was most likely to be discovered at fairs and merry-makings, they ought

to make a point of visiting such places, when they occurred at any reasonable distance from London.

Now it happened that Charlton fair was to be held within a few days of that very time ; and, as at the period of which we are treating, this particular fair was in high repute,—many persons going there in masquerade,—and it was, therefore, likely to attract the gipsies from all parts of the country, the couple resolved to start for Old Charlton early in the morning of the first fair day, so as to lose no time in beginning their search.

It was with a feeling of great satisfaction that Guy laid his head on the pillow that night, for the events of the day, joined to his broken rest of the night before, had thoroughly worn him out.

Fagged, however, as he was, still mindful of the earnest words of his dear mother at home, he did not retire to rest until he had poured forth, in his simple way, his gratitude to God for having saved him from the danger which had hung over his head, and his supplication to the Supreme for further support and guidance.

The post, next morning, brought him a letter in a strange hand, which appeared, from the mark outside, and the large 2d. impressed upon it, to have come from the City.

“Who can this be from?” asked Guy, as he turned and twisted the letter about, and tried to guess at the writer from the characters of the address.

“Don’t you think you’d better open it and see?”

said practical Mrs Warkup, "instead of guessing who can have sent it you?"

"Well, mother," answered Guy, breaking it open with a smile, "that would be the shortest way certainly."

The contents were very brief, for he read them in a twinkling, and passed the letter over for his good friend's inspection.

"Read it, my dear, aloud," said Mrs Warkup; "I haven't my glasses."

This Guy at once proceeded to do as follows:—

"Mr GUY RIVERS,

"SIR,—I am desired by Sir W—— W——, the Lord Mayor, to inform you, that if, in consequence of recent events, you should be seeking employment, you may perhaps hear of something advantageous by calling upon Messrs Clayton and Company, Italian raw silk merchants, of Wood Street, Cheapside.—I am SIR, yours, etc.

"JAMES FARLEY."

"What do you think of that, mother?" inquired Guy.

"Why, I suppose," said Mrs Warkup, gravely, "they mean to take you away from me again."

"I hope they mean to offer me a situation," observed Guy, "for I don't like the idea of being idle."

"Of course, I know that," said Mrs Warkup—"and I know, too, that you never could be idle, let

you be where you would. But why can't you be comfortable here?"

"What!" commenced Guy, "in a . . ."

He was going to say "public house;" but, considering before he uttered it, that the expression, as he meant to use it, could not be agreeable to his protectress, he stopped short and allowed her to fill up the blank, which she did in these words:—

"You might just as well have finished, Guy, and said 'public' at once; you wouldn't have offended me, my dear. But come, now, listen to me, for I'm going to talk to you very seriously indeed." After a little pause, Mrs Warkup went on: "Since you and I first met, Master Guy, I have found the business rather more troublesome to me than I used to think it; and somehow, too, I have begun to feel a little ashamed of it. Not for myself,—it can't matter to me; but I've felt it so, for your sake, when I've seen you sitting here, and thought how differently you'd been brought up. I am getting old, besides, and that has something to do with it,—and I want rest, and I am more than half determined to sell the business, and get out of it, and take a little cottage, with a pretty garden somewhere near about; for I don't want to go far from London. Now, my dear, as I've already told you, I've no relations of my own to come after me, and when I die, all the money that was left me, and what I've made myself, will go to my husband's relations, who never cared for him when alive, or me either, unless—mind you

this Guy—unless I choose to leave it to anybody else.”

Mrs Warkup stopped here to take breath, and mark the effect of her speech upon the listening youth; but, with the exception of a look of sympathy, expressed forcibly in all his features, there was nothing from which to gather any shade or suspicion of avaricious desire.

Mrs Warkup went on:—“Suppose now, Guy, I should happen to love somebody better than any one else in the world, and I should say to that somebody,—‘If you’ll consent to live with me, and act towards me as a son should act to his mother, I’ll give up my business, and take a pretty little house, with a nice bit of ground; and when I die, I’ll leave you all I have,’—what would somebody answer?”

The worthy landlady, having put this serious problem before the youth, with all the gravity becoming the occasion, sat herself upright in her high-backed chair, and waited patiently, with her chubby hands interlaced, for a solution.

Guy did not keep her long in suspense; nor was his reply couched in the same obscure terms as her inquiry, for he answered at once:

“I don’t ask you, mother, if, by *somebody*, you mean me; for the way you looked at me told me that you meant nobody else. Supposing, then, that you *do* mean it, this is my answer:—If it will make you happier to do as you say, I ought to have no possible objection to it. You have been as good as

a mother to me already, and I should be a bad fellow indeed if I didn't feel very, very grateful. Only, look here, mother : if you leave this place, and take a cottage, as you say, of course I shall be only too pleased to go and live with you in it ; but I mustn't forget I've got my way to make in the world, and that I've come up to London to do it. I must work, for I can't be easy in my mind if I don't ; but when my work's over, then—"

"What then, Guy?" asked Mrs Warkup, with sparkling eyes.

"Why, then, mother, I shall be happy to come home of an evening, and try and be a son to you."

Mrs Warkup caught him in her arms, and kissed him heartily ; and, from that moment, she began to take steps to put her project into execution.

Guy, meanwhile, though deeply touched by this new proof of his worthy landlady's affection, allowed his actions to be so little affected by the prospect she had spread before his eyes, that he set out, immediately after breakfast, to call upon the Messrs Clayton, in pursuance of the hint contained in the letter.

The reasons which led to that communication being made were curious, and will serve to show upon what strange out-of-the-way pivots many events in our lives are made to turn.

Mr Clayton, the only acting partner of the firm of Clayton & Co., was present at the Guildhall during the examination of Guy ; and was so struck by the



lucid way in which the youth described his adventure, and by the general intelligence he displayed, that he at once set inquiries on foot concerning him.

It happened that the junior clerkship in his house was about to become vacant; and, thinking it probable that he could do the youth a good turn, and suit himself at the same time with an efficient hand, he imparted his idea to the Lord Mayor, who was a personal acquaintance, and the result was the letter received by our young friend.

Guy found the Messrs Clayton & Co.'s place of business without difficulty; for it seemed to be perfectly well known in the neighbourhood, having, indeed, been established there for more than half-a-century.

Passing through a paved court, which was bordered on the right and left by warehouses, Guy entered the counting-house by a door, with an oval glass window in it, like a huge staring eye.

On inquiring for Mr Clayton, and presenting the letter he had received to a good-humoured portly personage, who turned out to be the book-keeper, the youth was ushered into an inner room, through another passage, having samples of beautiful white and yellow silk, done up in rich twisted skeins, that reminded him, on a gigantic scale, of the productions of his own silk-worms at home.

Mr Clayton was a tall and stout old gentleman, whose appearance was principally remarkable for a

small head, totally destitute of hair or whisker, and a body, whose capacious dimensions it were vain to attempt to grasp.

He wore a green waistcoat, which fitted his capacious person to a nicety; only Guy could not help conceiving the notion, as he gazed upon it, that the buttons, which adorned it from the bottom to the top, were so many adventurous urchins climbing up a steep grassy hill, and many of whom, if they did not cling very tightly, ran great risk of getting an ugly fall.

The wealthy merchant's reception of the youth was particularly kind. He made him sit down and relate various particulars of his journey to London, and his employment with Mr Bindwell; and having satisfied himself upon the spot with respect to his handwriting and knowledge of accounts, by bidding the youth copy off a letter and make certain calculations, he engaged him as junior clerk in his firm, at a salary of sixty pounds for the first six months—the engagement to commence that day fortnight.

Guy was delighted beyond measure at what he deemed the “princely” salary offered him. It is true, he would not, as on the last occasion, board and reside upon the premises; but, considering the conversation he had so recently held with Mrs Warkup, the arrangement, instead of being unsatisfactory, was precisely the reverse; and, while sure of a comfortable home, he would be able, with economy, to save the best part of his earnings.

Having thus secured, in the way which most pleased him, a fixed occupation for no very remote date, he took his leave of Mr Clayton, and hurried back to the "Sparrow and Post," to communicate to his kind friend intelligence which, he was sure, would greatly delight her.

Tom was there before him, and had done a good morning's work, too, for he had called upon Mr Bindwell and settled with him, both for himself and Guy.

He had brought away, also, the boxes and other little property to which Guy could lay claim, and had obtained from their late master a full half-year's salary for each. He found, likewise, at the place in Fleet Street, a letter, that had been addressed there by Guy's sister, and he related various scraps of news which he had picked up on the occasion of his visit.

"There's been a tremendous to-do in the house, Muster Guy," observed Tom, as he brought his budget of news to a close. "It seems that the master's sister has suddenly left the place, and no one can tell where she's gone. Of course *I* didn't choose to let them know what *I* knew; but it seems when she went away from here last night, she didn't go back home."

"I hope nothing has happened to her," said Guy, with a look of alarm.

"I don't think so," remarked Tom; "the fact is, I fancy between you and me, she doesn't feel quite so

well-disposed towards her brother as she used to do. And if she isn't blind, small blame to her for that same."


Guy placed his first earnings into Mrs Warkup's lap with a look of pride and pleasure combined, that made his face look almost handsome.

"Dear me!" said the good soul, as she gazed up into his face with a smile, "What a sum! I must positively have another bolt to-night put upon that street door!"

Guy patted her cheek and shook his head at her; then, anxious to be alone, he ran up stairs, and, tearing open his letter, eagerly perused its contents.

It was from Sophy, his ever-thoughtful and regular correspondent. She certainly had kept the promise she gave him at parting; nor, indeed, had Guy broken his.

We are rarely destined in this world to enjoy unmixed pleasure or suffer unalloyed pain. The intelligence conveyed by this epistle, although not positively unfavourable, somehow damped the high spirits which his interview with Mr Clayton had raised. Guy's sister did not seem to anticipate success for their father in his business at Portsmouth; although Guy gathered thus much rather from what she concealed than what she said. Her account of his demeanour and health was somewhat curtailed; but she dwelt as usual with warmth and fondness on the mother's devotion, and the delight



they had all experienced at hearing of Guy's success.

"I wish she had told me something about herself?" muttered Guy, as he re-descended the stairs; "but that's dear Sophy all over; thinking of everybody but herself, bless her."

CHAPTER XXVIII.


THE VISIT TO CHARLTON FAIR—A RECOGNITION—A
FRESH JOURNEY—LOST AND FOUND.

THE morning of the day which was to commence the fun and gaiety of Charlton fair, saw Tom and Guy Rivers, at an early hour, proceeding down the Old Kent Road at a pace that proved they were quite fresh and prepared for their work.

A mist hung over the streets and shut out distant objects, but it already began to be pervaded with that golden warmth which gives promise of a beautiful day. It was very charming even then, for the thin vapour imparted a wonderful softness to the shrubs and trees, and hung upon the blades of grass and in the spiders' webs, like myriads of pearls.

Notwithstanding the serious nature of their errand, the two pedestrians were in capital spirits.

How could it be otherwise? It was not that their hearts were indifferent to the sorrows of the widowed mother, whose child they were about to seek. But they were in the enjoyment of excellent health, they had the prospect of a glorious day, and they were about to visit a scene of boisterous amusement, that has always great attractions for the young.



As they traversed, in great part, the very road by which Guy had entered London, some months before, it is not surprising, also, if he was particularly talkative; and Tom was so interested in everything that concerned his young friend, that he made the best of listeners, and sympathized most fully with the youth's feelings.

On reaching the brow of the hill at Blackheath, Guy led his companion off the main road towards the "Point," whence he had himself turned aside and obtained his first view of the great world.

The better to enjoy Tom's astonishment and delight,—for he had never been there before,—Guy made him close his eyes while he led him across the mossy turf to the bench upon which he had himself sat on that memorable evening; and then gloried to observe the worthy Tom, on reopening his eyes at a signal given, to see him stand speechless before the vast expanse of town and country, which was then glowing in an atmosphere of mingled sun and mist.

Resting for a space at that lovely spot, they crossed the Heath, upon which were already gathered in large numbers, the holiday donkeys and their drivers; the former with their linen-covered saddles, waiting patiently with heads bent down, as is their wont, until their labour should begin,—for donkeys work hardest when the juveniles hold festival,—and the latter, with sticks under their arms, vehemently talking among themselves, or on the look out

for innocent little boys, to whom they could give a penny ride for sixpence.

The tops of gipsies' tents and vans were visible in the hollows; while here and there a spiral column of smoke, rising in the immediate vicinity of the wanderers' simple dwellings, told that the pot was already suspended over the fire for the preparation of the mid-day meal.

Guy gave a wary look at each of these suspicious establishments as he passed them by; but, although he saw swarthy men and orange-brown women, no faces like those he sought met his eye.

The road they were now upon, which led direct to Old Charlton, through a delightful and finely-wooded piece of country, was already alive with human beings, chiefly lads and boys, with an occasional cart or truck containing the materials of a tent or a chaos of glaringly-coloured toys.

They obtained a crust of bread and cheese and a rest upon a bench by the road-side, conveniently placed beneath a shady tree, at no great distance from their place of destination.

The sun was getting hot, and as they were in no particular haste, they stopped there for a good hour, watching the people as they went by, and scanning each face that appeared of darker hue than ordinary.

"Do you think you'd remember that fellow again?" inquired Guy, alluding to the gipsy who had called upon Mr Bindwell, and whom Tom had jostled so unceremoniously at the shop door.

"Trust me for that," said Tom. "You see, Muster Guy," he continued, giving utterance to a train of thought which had been engaging his mind, "the first thing we have to do is to find out if these people have still got the little girl in keeping; and if they have, the next thing will be to carry her off *somehow*."

"True," said Guy, "but the *very* first thing, Tom, if there can be *two* firsts, is to find out the people themselves. If we can only do that, I don't think it will be difficult to see whether the poor little girl is with them. As to carrying her off, *that*, perhaps, won't be so easy. But, at all events, we can give information to the police."

"We won't apply to those gentry," said Tom, with emphasis, "unless we can't help it. They're so apt to muddle a thing, they are. These new-fangled police aren't at all equal to the old runners, to my mind."

"Nor to the old Charlies either?" inquired Guy, slyly.

Tom didn't answer this question, but got up, saying, "it was time for them to move on."

If Tom had not known the particular locality where the fair was held, the stream of people, all moving to one point, would have sufficiently explained it. And, besides, as they walked on, the strains of distant music and the hum of many voices, mixed at intervals with the sound of a Chinese gong, came plainly to the ear and told them the road they should take.

The village of Old Charlton, with its square towered red-brick church, and the fine old Elizabethan mansion of the Wilsons, next came in view; and as they left the latter on their right, and had the venerable church before them, they caught a glimpse over the tops of the trees and through the breaks in Hanging Wood, of the glistening river, with vessels passing to and fro upon it.

The "Bugle Horn" and other inns of the place were already full to overflowing; and at that early hour, it was scarcely two o'clock, every bench and available seat was occupied.

Our travellers, however, had already had their rest, and felt comparatively fresh, so they passed on, without further delay, to the Fair-field.

It was a spot admirably adapted for the purpose to which it was put; being bordered on two sides by a road with lofty trees, and having other open grounds at its further limits.

As Tom and Guy arrived at the paling which partly shut it in, the fun had commenced in right good earnest; and almost every sound which is common upon earth was heard, blended with the braying of trumpets and the braying of donkeys; the beating of drums and gongs; the cheers of scores of boys, who were assisting to drive round a whirl-about with the distant hope of getting a ride in turn; the shrieks of women, who had been persuaded to go up "in a swing," and were now both alarmed and ill at the speed with which they were flying

through the air ; and all the other under-current of noise common to such places, and made up of the invitations of showmen, the squeakings of Punch, the barking of dogs, the firing of crackers, and the hoarse roar of assembled thousands calling out to each other, laughing, chatting, or quarrelling.

Our two visitors made their way through the open space into the crowd, which had congregated in what might be called the High Street of the fair.

It was partly enclosed on each side by a row of booths, whereof the shopmen, or more often shop-women, offered for sale a vast quantity of objects that people never seemed to buy, or didn't appear to know what to do with if they did.

There were displays of ginger-bread nuts sufficient to give a whole army an indigestion ; the places which vended them being, moreover, adorned with huge cock-a-doodle doos in breeches, all formed of the same brown paste, and gaudily gilt to make them more conspicuous.

There were booths for false jewellery in every shape, for toys from every land ; there were special ones for dolls of all degrees of ugliness and beauty, from the senseless block, which might become a formidable weapon in the hands of an angry child, to the dainty lady-doll with wax bust and head, blue eyes and flaxen hair, and beautifully moulded arms and feet, also of wax, and tinged of the most impossible flesh colour.

There were drinking-booths, and sparring-booths,

and dancing-booths. There was Richardson's theatre, and there was the monstrous dancing saloon of the "Crown and Anchor," which alone seemed to cover an acre of ground.

And then the shows! Shows of fat women and overgrown pigs; of living monstrosities and dead mermaids; of performing dogs and learned goats; of giants eight feet high, and dwarfs who lived in houses of scarce thirty inches, roof, chimney-pots, and all.


While Tom was eagerly listening to two stout fellows, dressed in fighting costume, and who were inviting the lovers of the fancy to walk up and see the match between Bill Sikes and Little Jemmy for "five pounds aside," he suddenly felt his arm convulsively pressed by Guy.

Turning sharply round, he perceived the youth's eyes to be fixed upon a van, that stood a little back from the row, at the door of which was a woman, calling out some directions to a broad-shouldered fellow beneath, who was just walking away with a bundle of sticks in his arm, similar to those used at the game of "three throws a penny."

"That's the woman," exclaimed Guy, in a whisper.

"And that's the man," said Tom, in the same tone, as the fellow turned to move away, and presented his full face towards them.

"You do your best with the woman, Muster Guy," said Tom, "for you seem to get on with them, and I'll follow the man. Don't move away from about



here, and I'll join you again. Let us see which will have most success."

Whereupon Tom hastily passed through the crowd in the direction taken by the gipsy.

The woman having seated herself upon the highest step of the ladder, which was fixed up to her street-door, Guy at once sauntered towards her, and looking at her as he came near, in a way that naturally attracted her attention, said:

"I think I've seen you before."

"That's very likely," said the woman, "for I'm out and about enough."

"Yes," continued Guy, as if recalling the place to his mind, "I'm sure I have. Don't you remember, last June, being near Gravesend and stopping at a spring, and a boy getting a drink of water for your little girl?"

"Well," answered the woman, looking intently at him as she spoke, with her piercing black eyes, "I do recollect something of it; and now I recollect you too. You are the lad who got the water."

"Yes," said Guy, speaking with as much indifference as he could command, although his heart was beating somewhat more forcibly than usual; "and I hope your little girl is better than she was then?"

"Not much of that," said the woman, thrown off her guard by the simple manner assumed by the youth; "she has been very bad indeed, and once or twice I thought we should have lost her."

"Oh, I'm sorry for that," exclaimed Guy, heartily, "for she seemed a nice little thing. Do you know, I've often thought of her, and how ill she looked."

Again the woman fixed her eyes upon him, as if she tried to read his inmost thoughts; but Guy was now fully on his guard, and a second time disarmed her suspicions by the perfect ease of his manner.

"Won't you let me see her," he asked, looking up into her face with a smile, "or is she too ill to come out?"

"You should see her directly if she was here," answered the woman, "but we left her behind us at our last stopping place."

Guy burned to ask her where that was, but considering that such a question might make her guess he had some deeper motive than he had hitherto shown, and that he could probably arrive at the knowledge he now wanted through some other source, he made some indifferent remark, bade her "Good day," and passed on.

"What have you learnt?" he inquired of Tom, as they met a few minutes afterwards.

"Nothing, I'm sorry to say, that's good for anything," he replied, in a tone of annoyance. "I lost sixpence to the fellow, too, for I threw a dozen and a half sticks at a threepeny snuff-box, without hitting it once. And all I could get out of the chap was, that they'd come from Norwood, and were going, after this fair was over, into Essex."

"My dear Tom," exclaimed Guy, eagerly, "we've learnt, then, *all* we want."

Whereupon Guy, in a state of considerable excitement, related to Tom his conversation with the woman.

Tom was no less pleased than his young friend at the clue thus obtained; and as it was still early in the afternoon, they resolved to direct their steps to Norwood at once.

Their first idea was to proceed thither on foot, but by the time they got again upon Blackheath, they felt so tired, that they sat down to rest and consult whether it would not be better to defer their visit till the following day.

This plan, however, did not suit the ardour of young Guy, who, now that he was upon the track, felt as impatient as a sporting dog to follow up the scent.

"Why not hire a donkey chaise?" asked Guy, half in joke.

"Why not?" repeated Tom, who followed up his inquiry, by hailing the nearest.

A bargain was soon struck, and the two travellers, seating themselves grandly in the equipage, were driven off at as fast a pace as the two grey asses could be persuaded into going. Fortunately it was the animals' first journey, and they were not therefore over-tired.

"And now we *are* here," exclaimed Tom, after discharging their vehicle at the bottom of Norwood hill, "what do we mean to do?"

Guy solved this difficulty in a way of his own. Having some pence in his pocket, he presented first one and then another to sundry little children he met, on asking them whether they knew where a poor sick girl, whom he described, was lodging.

Having disposed of seven pennies in this mode, he learnt from the last, an intelligent child of nine or ten years of age, that such a little invalid as he spoke of was at Mrs Hibbud's, but that she was very ill.

Their informant was persuaded to show them to the house—a poor cottage by the way-side—which displayed upon a board, much the worse from exposure to the weather, that “mangling” was done there.

Tom now took the lead, and assuming an air of gravity calculated to bear out the character of a detective, which he had put on for this occasion, in spite of his prejudice against the fraternity, he knocked at the door and raised the latch.

The cottage was of the very smallest dimensions, being composed merely of two rooms opening into each other.

The one they entered was at once the parlour and kitchen of the dwelling, and beyond was its sole and miserable sleeping-chamber.

An old woman, whose sight appeared to be affected by some complaint which occasioned a perpetual discharge from the eyes, rose from a chair where she had been sitting, and asked them their business.

To this Tom replied, by stating, from "information received at the Police-office," he understood that a little girl, believed to be stolen, had been left there to nurse by a gipsy man and woman, and he had been sent to make inquiry into the matter.

At the sound of the word "Police," the old woman, who would perhaps have refused them all intelligence, became profuse in her excuses and in her expressions of sympathy for the poor little girl, who, she explained, had been left there in the manner stated, but that she knew no more than a babe unborn where she came from or whom she belonged to, which was most probably the fact.

Tom, in a pompous manner, which he considered acting his part to perfection, stopped her short in the middle of her protestations, and bade her lead them to the child's bed.

The woman lost no time in obeying the order, and Guy and Tom followed her into the next room.

Upon a small pallet-bed, placed at the foot of a larger one, lay a little figure wrapped in the bed-clothes; but so still was it beneath the patchwork coverlet, that Guy put his head down close to the face to make sure that the prostrate form really lived. Then, indeed, he heard the child breathe in short thick gasps. There wanted no surgeon by to tell how diseased were her poor lungs.

The youth gazed for a few moments steadfastly at the sleeping girl. There could be no doubt of it.

She was the very same he had beheld some months before, and with whom he had interchanged gifts. But more sunken still were the pallid cheeks ; darker circles were in the cavities of the eyes, and a red spot, large as a sixpence, appeared as if burnt on to the right cheek bone. But her beautiful locks of gold, which she inherited from her mother, were gone—they had been cut off, the woman said, during her fever.

Deeply pained at the condition of the child, Guy turned away to the window ; but a moment after he approached the woman, and asked her whether she had seen in the little girl's possession a bright penny.

She did not answer him in words ; but going to the sleeping child, she gently pulled a ribbon that was round her neck, when at the end of it appeared the very coin, now pierced with a hole, which he had given her on the occasion of their meeting.

The youth was so touched by this evidence of the value she put upon his gift, that he was forced again to move aside to conceal his tears.

"We shall return here again most probably to-morrow," said Guy, when he had recovered, "and a lady will very likely be with us. Take care of the poor little girl, and you will be well paid for your trouble."

"And mind," added Tom, as he held up his finger, "you will be answerable for her to the police!"

They were both too full of thought, as they left the house, to spend much time in conversation ; and

when they had a little recovered from the shock which the sight of the poor little sufferer had caused them, they were so tired with their day's tramping, as to be little inclined to talk.

Still, they marched on bravely, and never counted the mile-stones until they came to the last, within a short distance of their home. Then, indeed, they both exclaimed, that they were so fagged that they could not have reached the house if it had been a mile further.

Guy did not rise till late the following morning, and when he did so, he felt so strongly the effects of the fatigue he had undergone, as to resolve not to stir out that day.

But his determination, and, indeed, all feeling of lassitude, forsook him, when, in the afternoon, a coach drove up to the door, and Mrs Lindell alighted from it.

Let him tell his story, Guy thought, as cautiously as he would, there would be a terrible outburst when he related to her what he had discovered.

It was, however, just the reverse. The lady's cheek became paler, it is true, if that were possible, and her hand trembled, but her voice was clear, and her eyes were more brilliant than before.

"Are you ready?" she inquired of him, when he had told all.

"Do you wish, then, madam," he inquired, "to go at once?"

"Why not? The coach is at the door."

"Very well, madam," answered Guy. "I will not keep you long."

Guy left the room to change his dress, and call Tom, who was shortly on the spot; and then handing the lady inside, and seating himself on the opposite seat, Tom got up on to the box beside the driver, and they set off at a good pace.

The lady spoke not one word during that drive; and as her veil was down, and its material was thick, Guy could not see her face. He observed that her hands—she had taken off her gloves—were clasped convulsively together, and that her bosom heaved as though she were sobbing inwardly; but there was no sound uttered, and whatever the agony of suspense, it was borne with the fortitude of a Christian martyr.

They reached the house at last, and Tom got down to open the coach-door.

Guy assisted the lady to alight, and offered her his arm to conduct her within the house, for she trembled in descending from the coach, and the youth feared she would fall.

She thanked him, however, with a motion of her head, and walked in without assistance.

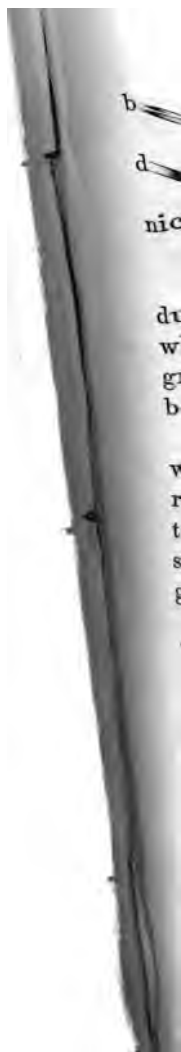
The old woman, in expectation of this visit, had rendered herself as neat as a clean cap and apron could make her, and had also tidied up her room.

"How is the little girl?" asked Guy.

The woman shook her head, and answered; "but poorly, sir."



MRS. LINDELL AND HER LOST CHILD.



The chamber-door was opened, and they all stood back to let the lady pass.

She turned round to them, still veiled, and, drawing up her figure, motioned them to retire.

They did so, and Guy closed the door of communication.

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Who shall say what passed within that chamber during the next two hours? Who shall describe, where there was no human eye to see, the joy or the grief felt by the parent and child, at meeting, and beholding one another after so cruel an absence?

Surely few words could have been uttered, or they would have pierced through the thin partition and reached the ears of the party close by. No loud tears were shed, or their echo must have been made sensible to those without. No; all was silent as the grave.

Alarmed at last, Guy tapped gently at the door. There was no answer. He knocked again, and louder. With the same result. He gently turned the handle and looked in.

Mrs Lindell was kneeling by the bed-side of her child, round whose form her arms were tightly clasped.

She had removed her bonnet, and her golden hair, in all its rich profusion, was waving partly down her back, and partly over the coverlet and pillow of the bed.

Seeing how still she was,—how still they both

were,—the party upon tiptoe, and holding their breath,—for they were awe-stricken by they knew not what,—slowly approached.

The lips of mother and daughter were fixed together in a close and tender embrace ; and so pallid were the two faces, so sharp the features and *so cold*, they seemed more like marble effigies of humanity than living, sentient creatures.

They were but effigies. For in that sacred, tender kiss, the spirit of each had fled in company to a better world !

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE NEW PLACE—ITS MEMBERS—GUY'S STUDIES—AN
UNEXPECTED RETURN—A REMOVAL.

SO many events pressed upon Guy Rivers, which, to his young mind, were of an all-important character, that he had but little opportunity to dwell upon the sad close of his exertions to restore little Ellen Lindell to her mother's arms.

An inquest was held, and an inquiry set on foot concerning this mysterious affair, in the course of which Mr Bindwell, from some motives of his own, appeared so anxious to conciliate young Guy, that he actually paid him a visit at the "Sparrow and Post," and offered to take him back to his service at an increased salary.

Guy, who was already engaged to the Messrs Clayton, received these advances with a coolness which belonged to another age, but did not trouble himself to examine into the motive that dictated them from a person usually so unbending as his late master.

Not so Tom ; who attributed to Mr Bindwell's fear of the youth's saying too much, this wonderful condescension and benevolence.

Whatever the cause, it never forced its way before the public mind.

The vault which enclosed the poor remains of two human creatures, who, in life, had loved and suffered so much, entombed likewise the secret, if any, that hung over the story of the kidnapped child.

Some might suspect, but no one ever knew whether Mr Bindwell was implicated in the wicked act. But if he did it, with the view of inheriting his sister's wealth, as being her only living relation upon the removal of her child, then the act was no only a wicked but a useless one ; for, shortly after her loss, she had, unknown to him, made a Will in due form, leaving all her property to her daughter if ever recovered alive, and in case of that daughter's death, she bequeathed it to an asylum for female orphans.

The Will was disputed by the bookseller, on the ground of his sister's weakness of intellect ; but some months after the event which consigned her to her grave, Tom pointed out to his young friend a paragraph in a newspaper, that told how Mr Bindwell lost his suit.

Days rolled on, and the morning at last came when Guy was to take his stand once more in the busy resort of men, the city of London.

Both he and Mrs Warkup had hoped, before he did so, that the arrangements with respect to the disposal of her business would have been settled and that he would start for his journeys "to town

from a neat little private house somewhere in the suburbs.

But affairs of this nature often absorb a great deal of time ; and they were compelled to wait, with what patience they could muster, for the realization of their wishes.

Nothing could exceed the cordiality displayed by every person engaged at the new place, when Guy entered it.

Mr Clayton himself was in the counting-house on his arrival, and introduced him, by name, to each member of his establishment.

First and foremost—not only from his size, but the position he held in the house—was the book-keeper and cashier, Mr Brown, who had grown up with his master, and had become so much a part of the business, that it could scarce be expected to go on without him.

Next came Signor Vanti, the foreign correspondent, who looked, what he undoubtedly was, a man of high intelligence and a gentleman.

Then followed the junior clerk, James Fendle, a young man of about twenty, whom Guy was to succeed on his appointment to a capital berth in the house of one of the correspondents abroad. His departure was to be deferred a day or two in order to initiate Guy into his duties.

After him appeared the chief and under-ware-housemen and packers, who looked in from their work to give the youth a friendly nod. And he was

informed by his predecessor, that two other gentlemen were occasionally in the office, but were at present abroad, travelling for the house.

From the disposition which our readers, by this time, will have recognised as belonging to young Rivers, they will believe that he spared no efforts to conciliate those around him, by strict attention to his duties.

He found such attention much more needed in his new post than he had discovered it in his former one; for the work that fell to his share was complicated to a young head, on account of the numerous branches into which it was divided.

He had a set of accounts to keep entirely by himself; and, moreover, to assist Mr Brown in checking and posting-up the ponderous ledgers of that equally ponderous gentleman.

He had a cash-book, and a banker's-book, and a warehouse-book, and a variety of other books, whose very names were at first, from their novelty, startling to him.

There were bales of silk to be received and entered; there were other bales to go out and be advised; there were sales to attend, and docks to visit; there were charges to be taken account of, and duly noted down; and there were sundry inquiries to be constantly answered, which the junior clerk was supposed to know more about than anybody else, as it was to him the applications were always made.

Guy was not long in discovering that Mr Brown,

the book-keeper, liked his chat and his ease, and was willing to put off all the work he could on to any one's shoulders that were broad enough and willing enough to bear it. Guy's happened to be well supplied in both these particulars; and the result was an amount of labour, to which he had, in his first situation, been a stranger.

Habit, however, soon accustoms the mind to perform with ease what, at the first encounter, appears almost insurmountable; and Guy Rivers, after a time, glided as successfully along his numerous paths as he had formerly done over his single track.

He was fortunate in possessing a master who knew how to appreciate worth where he found it, and who was aware how far a kind word from a principal contributes to the happiness of a subordinate. His good-humoured smile to Guy, on entering the counting-house of a morning, was like a gleam of sunshine to the sensitive youth, and would make him feel that, to merit the approbation of his master, he could perform twice the labour he had to get through.

In Signor Vanti, also, he found a staunch friend and counsellor.

That gentleman, who was an advocate in his own land, had been compelled, from political causes, to become an exile. Having lost his fortune, which the Government had confiscated, he had been forced, on arrival in the country that had received him so hospitably, to seek employment whereby to earn his

livelihood. Being slightly acquainted with Mr Clayton, through an introduction given him by a mutual friend, he applied to him for advice in his difficulty, and was offered a seat in that gentleman's office as correspondent for French and Italian, the clerk who performed that duty being appointed as extra traveller.

He had filled the situation, at the time of his introduction to Guy, during some two years, and had endeared himself to every one in the house by his courteous manners and honourable spirit.

Guy could not have met with a more valuable friend, or one who was better calculated to direct his studies in the right line; for young Rivers was not slow to discover how defective was his knowledge on many points with which it behoved him to be acquainted.

The youth was even as yet ignorant of the abilities he really possessed, simply for the reason that no opportunity had been given to push them forward. One strong feature of his natural powers of mind—viz., a facility for acquiring languages—was now first brought to light, and the mode of its discovery may with propriety be here related.

The letters addressed to the house were opened in the morning by Signor Vanti, who made notes for the purpose of replying to them at proper time. Where they contained orders or remittances, consignments or advices of drafts, Guy had to enter the particulars into his various books, and was forced,

consequently, to trust to the Signore for the information.

One day, as that gentleman was very busy upon some important work, and Guy was waiting for certain data, he took up the Italian letter which contained the intelligence, and tried to discover it for himself.

He partly succeeded in doing so; when, suddenly yielding to an idea which had come across him, he said, half aloud, as he looked up at the ceiling, "I wonder whether I could ever learn Italian?"

"Why not?" said Signor Vanti, who, having finished the work he was about, had been carefully watching Guy's anxious face poring over the letter.

"Oh, it seems so difficult," answered the youth, "that I'm afraid I should never manage it."

"You don't *think* that, I'm sure," observed Signor Vanti, looking full into the lad's intelligent eyes. "Why should it be more difficult for you to learn Italian than for me to learn English?"

"Because there's such a difference," said Guy, "between you and me."

"If there is," returned Signor Vanti, "the advantage is, I fancy, on your side. Come now, will you try, if I'll undertake to teach you?"

"I will, indeed," said Guy earnestly.

And Guy did try. And more than that, he succeeded beyond even his kind master's expectation. By a peculiar formation of mind, many things which to others appear difficult were grasped by him at

once ; and, by the time a few weeks had passed over, Guy was able to read through and understand most of the letters which were addressed to the house.

But a more important result arose from this study even than the acquirement of the language sought. Finding, when he came to study the grammar, and more particularly the verbs, that he was defective in a knowledge of his own tongue, he took up Lindley Murray and the exercises, and went through both with exemplary patience. The perseverance, indeed, which he displayed, could not fail to bring him success, even if his abilities had been greatly inferior to what they actually were ; for, when he was studying the Italian verbs, he not only learnt all the regular ones by heart, but wrote out all those whose conjugation was irregular, in a small book, which he carried constantly in his pocket, and as frequently referred to, until they were fixed indelibly on his memory.

The delight that Guy experienced in this acquirement of a new language, induced him, shortly after he began Italian, to apply himself to French ; and, although he found a little more difficulty in mastering the first principles, and particularly the pronunciation of this tongue, than he had experienced in the former case, his success was a second time commensurate with his application.

The conversation and advice of Signor Vanti were, besides, of singular advantage to the clever youth,

who, now that he had tasted the delights of knowledge, thirsted for it with insatiable desire.

Fortunate was it for young Guy that at this critical period of his life, when his mind was just awakening to a consciousness of its own powers, that he should have found for a companion a man so broadly intelligent as this Italian gentleman ; because, many things which, by his explanations were made at once clear and comprehensible, would have had to be sought out by his own unaided exertions, after infinite pains and by slow and uncertain paths.

Many were the hours after business which they spent in each other's company ; for Mrs Warkup had at last carried out her project, and purchased a small house in Islington, at a convenient walking distance from the city.

Met together during the winter evenings in the parlour of the cottage, with the bright fire burning in the grate, Guy would read aloud some Italian or French author ; or Signor Vanti and himself hold a broken conversation in one of those languages, while Mrs Warkup sat dozing in her arm chair, or listening to the "foreign talk," as if she understood every word that was uttered.

They were, in truth, quiet, peaceful hours, and they glided by so easily and imperceptibly, that but for the progress made in intellectual acquirements and the physical development of his frame, Guy might have fancied time stood still.

But, as in those seas where calms are so prevalent

that for weeks together no breeze will ruffle the even surface of the water, a storm will yet sooner or later come and arouse the quiescent waves, so certainly in this world of ours, will adverse events occasionally spring up, and, for a time, disturb the even tenor of calm human lives.

Guy Rivers was not one of those favoured sons of fortune on whom prosperity unmingled was destined to shine. His career had begun with change, and it appeared destined to undergo much more ere it was half run.

Winter was over and spring had come once more. The long dark evenings were being perceptibly shortened, and the days were gaining in proportion, and the youth looked forward with delight to the summer time, when he should again roam among the fields and see the corn waving in the breeze.

He could not, however, help feeling that he had derived great advantage from those dark wintry hours, during which his books had been his constant companions. He could not fail to experience delight, on comparing his actual knowledge with what he knew when first his work began; but while he was still as eager as ever to acquire more, he felt, as he saw the sun again pierce through the heavy clouds, a return of that desire for bodily exertion and athletic exercises, for which, when at school, he had made himself remarkable.

There could scarce be a better proof that his mind was more at ease.

Why should it not be so? His master had more than once *expressed* himself contented with the youth's services, and he showed his satisfaction by his behaviour towards him. Guy, on his part, had ceased to feel difficulty in the performance of his duties, and knew that he was storing up knowledge that would fit him, by and by, for higher things.

But there was yet another cause that, more than all the others, had set his heart at rest, and filled up an aching void which, in spite of himself, he had felt ever present there.

He was reconciled to his father.

He had waited and waited in vain for a line or message from his parent, that should give him an excuse for writing—for Guy was obstinate to an incredible degree where he considered he was right, and would not yield his point. But letter after letter came, mostly from his sister, sometimes from his mother, yet brought no word of greeting from *him*. Sophy, however, one day wrote that her father's health was quite giving away—that the business was about to be broken up—and that they were going to leave Portsmouth for Ventnor, in the Isle of Wight, where it was hoped they could manage to subsist upon the rental of the house at Maidstone, while their father gathered strength to renew the struggle for the support of his family.

The contents of this letter quite overcame the youth, and all his obstinacy vanished to the winds. Had he been free, he would have at once started to

embrace his family and assure his parents how much this intelligence pained him. His engagement with Messrs Clayton, at this early stage, made such a step unwise, but he did what circumstances allowed him, and he did it, too, with a heartiness and an unselfishness that would have won a much more stony nature than that of Mr Rivers. He wrote to him a letter in which he poured out his whole heart. He expressed to his father how anxious he had ever been to earn his good opinion—that, armed with *that*, there was little fear of his progress in the world; and he prayed him, by that great tie which God had created between them, to grant him his forgiveness and blessing. In a postscript, he begged his acceptance of a part of his earnings, a ten pound note, which, if he would not make use of himself, he hoped he would lay out for the benefit of the others.

The speed with which Mr Rivers replied to this letter of his son's, was in itself a proof that his arms had been long ready to open and embrace him, but that, like Guy himself, he had been withheld by that false pride and obstinacy which are often blameworthy among mere acquaintance, but that are positively wicked between parent and child. Mr Rivers rejoiced at his son's advancement, blessed him with his whole heart, and prayed him never to swerve from that path of truth and integrity which had hitherto gained him so many friends.

It may be easily credited that this letter had made Guy very, very happy. The style of his father's

writing induced him to believe that his health was not so bad as the fears of his family imagined it, and he hopefully looked forward to accounts from the Isle of Wight, which would confirm this favourable view.

Turning these and similar agreeable thoughts over in his mind, one day in March, as he came back from the city, he arrived at the little gate which led through a neatly-kept front garden to his quiet home.

On walking up the path, he observed some one sitting in the front parlour, but the windows were closed, and he could only distinguish that the visitor was a man.

"Tom, perhaps," he thought, as he quickened his step, for this worthy fellow had been absent from London for some months, having obtained an engagement with a gentleman down in the country.

The street-door was ajar, and the rough voice of a man was heard loudly talking; but the voice was certainly not that of Tom.

He opened the parlour-door and walked in, for he was curious to learn who could be the visitor.

He saw a stout young fellow, about a year older than himself, seated near the window, dressed in shabby sailor's clothes, and with a face bronzed almost to the hue of a gipsy's, though his hair was sandy.

The stranger ceased speaking as the youth went in, and nodded his head familiarly, in reply to his salutation.

Guy turned to Mrs Warkup for an introduction; but when he saw the mingled agitation, the joy, and the traces of tears upon her cheek and in her eyes, he guessed at once it was Mrs Warkup's son!

And Guy was right. The boat in which he had left the sinking vessel with the Captain, his wife, and others, had drifted out to sea, and after great suffering on the part of her passengers, had been picked up by a whaler bound for the South Pacific Ocean. The Captain showed the poor creatures all kindness in their extremity, but, from the nature of his voyage, he would not alter his course, nor did any vessel speak them until they were on their way homewards. Hence arose the total silence concerning their fate, and the grief to more than one heart that had mourned their loss!

Guy did his best during that evening to keep down the feeling of sadness which came over him as he looked upon young Warkup, and observed the intense joy of the mother. It was not because he saw his hopes of one day inheriting the property she possessed suddenly dashed to the ground, for he had never allowed himself to form them, and was even too young and too untouched by the world to trouble much about the future. But he was conscious, as he regarded the young man and listened to his coarse words and untutored mind, that he could never make him a companion, much less a friend, and that he should have to cast about to search elsewhere for a lodging.

In her first delight Mrs Warkup could not conceive this possibility, and probably, in the overflowing of her heart, she thanked Heaven that had granted her two sons, instead, as she once thought, of having bereaved her of all; but as the days wore on, and she saw no approach to intimacy between the two, she accepted, with many tears, and as a hard necessity, the conclusion come to by the son of her adoption, that they must part.

Still, she did not yield at once. She clung as long as she well could to the idea that they might all get on comfortably together; but her opposition gradually weakened, until the day arrived when Guy, with all his little treasures, drove away from the door that used to know him so long as its master.

He felt at first very lonely as he sat by himself in his little sitting-room, in the lodgings he had taken at a short distance from Mrs Warkup's. But he consoled himself with his books and studies, and with the consciousness that he had acted right in no longer trespassing on the hospitality of his good and tried friend.

"As long," he argued, "as the dear old mother was alone, I don't think I was doing wrong in living with her and allowing her to keep me, for I tried to make her happy in return for what she did for me; but now that her real son has come back, I've no excuse for troubling her any longer."

CHAPTER XXX.

A RE-APPEARANCE—A JOURNEY—THE COTTAGE ON THE
CLIFF—A HAPPY MEETING—THE CLOSE.

GUY RIVERS was young in years to be thrown thus alone on the great world without other resources for his subsistence than those which were to be derived from his own efforts, and with no other means of entertainment to his mind than such as he must himself supply.

Truth to say, it was a hazardous position, and one in which many youths would have become completely wrecked. But, on the other hand, the annals of this great metropolis can furnish scores of cases where lads, like Guy, have sought their fortunes in the same world wherein his lot was cast, and have, like him, without other friends than those they have themselves gathered about them, passed through the terrible ordeals of poverty, temptation, and pleasure, and established their positions, in spite of a thousand difficulties, as leading citizens of London.

Since Guy Rivers had become engaged on the active road of life, and felt the roughness and dangers which often assail those who travel along it, he had almost entirely abandoned the old habit of

dreaming, that in more idle hours had supplied the place of labour.

But the visions that he had, on some of these occasions, formed were not yet quite forgotten; and those which pictured him as acquiring wealth and honour, and presenting himself, laden with both, at his parents' feet, were remembered best of all, and would recur again to his mind, and act upon him, as a spur upon a jaded horse, when he began to flag in his studies and grow listless at his work.

A little incident occurred about this time which, from its being a curious coincidence, deserves recording, more particularly as the person to whom it refers exercised, at a later period, no little influence over Guy Rivers' life.

Mr Clayton, his principal, was accustomed to give every year, on the anniversary of the establishment of his house, a dinner and evening party, to which, among others, the whole of his clerks were invariably invited.

Young Guy, for whom Mr C. had formed a kind of personal attachment, from the fact of his having, in the first instance, observed and engaged him in the way that has been described, and, afterwards, from a just appreciation of his merits, was much noticed by many of the guests present, who had heard the story of the little handkerchief and the kidnapped child, from the lips of their host.

One of them, an old post captain in the navy, had a long talk with him, and expressed it as his

opinion, that the lad would have made "a first-rate sailor;" and while they were conversing, a young lady, about Guy's own age, came up, and putting her arm through that of the old gentleman, listened to their discourse, and gazed hard at Guy.

Now, it is a very difficult thing for a young fellow to remain cool and unmoved while a pair of brilliant eyes, set in a pretty face, are looking at him as intently as if they meant to carry away his portrait; and Guy was already confused by the circumstance, when the Captain—suddenly called away to join a party at whist—said hastily to the youth, "I must go, but my daughter will keep you in talk; won't you, Alice?"

"I suppose there's no help for it," she said, looking gaily at our young friend, "unless you would rather look at these plates."

She pointed, as she spoke, to a volume of engravings of remarkable places in England, that lay upon the table.

"Suppose we do both?" said Guy, offering her a chair.

"Oh, yes, willingly," she replied; and they sat down to the table together.

Guy soon recovered his courage as they turned over the leaves, and made their remarks upon the views represented.

"Kit's Coty-house!" exclaimed Miss Alice, as she came upon an engraving of that structure. "It's very like it."

"You have seen it, then?" said Guy.

"Oh, yes, at the beginning of last summer. Indeed, I had quite a little adventure there."

Whereupon she began to tell him how, being on a visit at her aunt's at Rochester, a party of them had driven over to Maidstone to a flower-show; how, upon the road, they had alighted from the carriage, and she and her cousin had run a race to see who could get to "Kit's Coty-house" first; and how, upon her reaching it, she had nearly run over a boy who was sleeping there. "He woke up," she said, laughing, "with *such* a start; and there we stood looking like two little fools at each other, till my cousin came up."

As she finished speaking, she gazed full into Guy's face, and was surprised to see how flushed it appeared.

If truth must be told, they were found—but this time by Mr Clayton—"looking again like two little fools at each other;" for Guy had just told her that he was *one* of the little fools she had woke up so unceremoniously upon that memorable morning.

It is not surprising if an acquaintance thus made and renewed should bear, as its fruit in after years, a warmer and closer friendship.

Spring passed away, and summer came again, and with it fresh and more alarming accounts of Mr Rivers' health.

They made young Guy so unhappy, that Mr Clay-

ton perceived that something was wrong, and one day called him into his private room to inquire the cause.

"You shall start to-morrow, my boy," he said, when he had gathered from Guy's lips the subject of his preoccupation. "Go and learn at once when the coach leaves for Portsmouth, and let me know."

Guy was not long in obtaining the necessary particulars, which were at once communicated to the kind old gentleman, who bade him be off and do his packing, and take a fortnight's holiday.

Not satisfied even with this, Mr Clayton paid his fare down, and gave him a five-pound note besides, to put into his pocket, so that, considering he had only a few days before received his quarter's salary, young Guy found himself comparatively wealthy.

But the anxiety of his mind was such that not even the prospect of a long journey across the country, which at one time would have raised his spirits to the highest point, could arouse him from his feeling of depression; and it was not till some few hours had passed over, and the pure breath of nature, as it swept over heath and field, had played freely upon his face, that he recovered his wonted calmness.

Then, indeed, the elasticity of spirit natural to youth made him think, as he had done before, that the accounts received from home were exaggerated by the fears and affection of the family, and that

on his arrival down he should find his father already convalescent.

Quieting himself with this reflection, he allowed his admiration for beautiful scenery, and his fondness for trees and green fields, and all the thousand familiar features of the country, to have entire play, and he chatted with his fellow-passengers, and got down for refreshment, and climbed up to his seat again, in all the fulness of thorough enjoyment.

Having crossed from Portsmouth to Ryde, in the Isle of Wight, on board one of the sailing packets which at that time were accustomed to perform the journey, he again found himself on the top of a coach, with another two or three hours' run before reaching his place of destination.

His excitement and impatience were extreme as he went on, but not even these could entirely destroy the delight he felt at the rural loveliness of many of the nooks which he passed by as he neared the end of his journey.

"Here we are!" exclaimed one of the passengers, when, having rattled down a descent at a pace which was startling to those that were unused to it, the horses were pulled up before an inn-door.

There were several persons waiting to see the coach come in, but Guy recognised no face familiar to himself. His journey had, in fact, been so hurried, that there was no time to apprise his family of his coming, and he had therefore to present himself before them perfectly unannounced.

There was a certain charm in the idea which pleased him mightily; and but for the bitter after-thought that illness was the motive of his visit, it would have appeared to him in the light of a joy and a happiness.

Leaving his carpet-bag in the custody of the bar-maid of the inn, from whom he also got a direction as to the probable residence of his father, Guy walked up the little town, at that time so scant of houses, that one side was open to the sea, and at length reached the further extremity.

Inquiring again at a small shop that appeared to sell everything, so very general was the store, a little cottage, which looked, at the point from which he viewed it, more like a bird-cage than a human dwelling, was pointed out to him half-way up a broken cliff, and completely embowered in honey-suckle and roses.

The path that led to it was somewhat steep, but not very difficult of access, and it presented, from the nature of the ground, a halting-place at every turn.

And if the visitor did halt, wherever his eyes fell they alighted only upon objects of beauty, no matter whether they roamed afar, and gazed at the open sea, specked with the white sails of passing vessels, or confined themselves to investigating spots in the immediate vicinity.

Each yard of ground was a study; every hollow was filled with ferns, in infinite variety, which, with

all their graceful foliage and charming tints, displayed themselves at will, unruffled by the wind.

Ivy of every kind, from the broad dark-green leaf to the very minutest species, crept up the masses of rock, and round each trunk and pole, then waved from the top, as if seeking what next to cling to for support.

And overhead, sweeping from the taller cliffs in rich profusion, were parasitic plants, which presented the spectacle of a cascade of leaf and flower, sparkling and glowing in the sunshine, and emitting sweet odours to each passing breeze.

Guy did not stop to examine these details; but he took them in at a glance when climbing upwards, and occasionally turning round his head to mark the progress he was making.

Although the house was now invisible, owing to the shrubs and portions of cliff by which the approach was surrounded, Guy felt that he was drawing near it, owing to the greater care bestowed upon the pathway, and the delicious scent of flowers that assailed him.

Fuschias, which elsewhere he had seen cultivated in pots, and sometimes blowing scantily in the beds of gardens, he now perceived in the shape of trees, forming a bower above his head, and drooping their bell-like flowers in myriads from the leafy roof. Lilacs, in full bloom, rose up on every side, and made the atmosphere fragrant with their breath. And above them all towered the laburnum, with its

rich clusters of golden blossom, that harmonized delightfully with the ivy-mantled cliff against which Guy viewed it in passing.

A small gate, with a latch, admitted him into the grounds of the cottage ; and, turning sharply round an angle formed by part of the projecting rock, he stood upon the grassy platform whereon the house was built, and came in view at once of all his heart held dearest.


Yes, they were all there—all ! Seated in an arm-chair, which had been placed just without the porch, where the sun's rays came askant, and warmed without fatiguing, sat Mr Rivers, pale, emaciated, it was true, but still, in the eyes of his son, looking better than he feared.

Beside him was his wife—that devoted wife, that tender mother—whose entire labour, wishes, thoughts, were concentrated in her husband and her family. She appeared the same as when he left her, and, as Guy fancied, a shade more cheerful.

Sophy, dear Sophy—the domestic chronicler, Guy's faithful correspondent—was reading, seated on a stool at a short distance.

Mary and Kate, with arms entwined about each other, were walking at the edge of the grass-plot, talking gravely ; and Willy was lying full sprawl upon his back, pretending to learn a lesson, although, if he did accomplish it in that position, it was not out of the book he held above his head.

Guy's heart beat very quickly as he stood for an



instant gazing at the group. It was for an instant only. The fall of his footstep on the gravel path made Mrs Rivers turn her head, and she rose with an exclamation, that "it was Guy!"

Then what a scene of confusion and excitement followed! Oh, the joy of family ties, where pure hearts and strong affections weave them! Who shall describe the depth of feeling which stirred the bosom of the mother as she pressed her son again and again in her arms—as she kissed him, held him from her, gazed into his eyes, and again folded him in her embrace!

The meeting between Guy and Sophy was more quiet, but not less tender. In the look that they exchanged, they promised each other hours of delightful talk, when their inmost thoughts should be unburthened.

Mr Rivers half rose from his chair to give his son a welcome; but Guy pressed forward, seated him again, and, falling on his knees, was so overcome with emotion, that he hid his head in his hands and sobbed aloud.

But this time the tears which he shed were not tears of grief, far less of despair. Joy at this reception—at this entire reconciliation to his father, towards whom, through everything, he had yearned with all the force of his sensitive mind—had much more to do in causing them to flow.

Nor was Mr Rivers himself less affected than his son. The silence which ensued upon Guy's action,

unbroken except by the sounds of human emotion, and the pattering of the leaves as they were struck together by the wind, proved how great the struggle that was going on within.

At last he spoke; and never did words sound sweeter to Guy's ear, or strike more deeply into his heart, than the—

“Bless you, my boy! God bless you!” uttered by his father.

A gladsome evening indeed was that spent by the whole family, thus again met together in harmony and love; and it was followed by many peaceful days, for Mr Rivers seemed to recover strength and spirits from that hour.

His late severe illness, which had given him full time for deep reflection, had at least wrought in him one great good: it had awakened him to a sense of the fatal path wherein he had been so long straying, and that was leading him unresistingly to an unhonoured grave.

That same reflection also had taught him that the mischief his evil course was doing to others was as great as that which it was inflicting on himself. It had already banished from his home the son whom, through all his anger, he could not but admire and love; it was driving away all peace and comfort and happiness from the breasts of those who remained; and it was presenting to his younger children an example which, if they did not imitate, must do much to sap their principles

of right and wrong. Yes, Mr Rivers was an altered man.

With what eagerness the family listened to Guy's adventures, they who know the interest felt by loving hearts in one another, can easily divine.

It seemed, as the week flew by and they reached the close, that months would not suffice to empty the stores of news. Nor probably would they, for each fresh remark brought to memory some little incident or event that had been forgotten till then, or was obscured by more important intelligence.

The day of parting came at last, but it found them full of hope, and cheerful, even through their regrets; for they had the consolation at heart that they were again reconciled, and meant henceforth to live in harmony and loving-kindness with each other.

Although the more serious trials of Guy's youth here terminate, it may be well to take a last glance at the progress of his after years, in order to prove to our young readers that the promise of his boyhood has not been belied as time moved on. It must however be remembered, that if that promise has been kept, it is due to the fact that Guy Rivers never swerved from the path of honour and industry which he had at so early a period marked out for himself as his own.

His first great rise in the house of business into which we have seen him introduced, arose purely

from the exertions he had made to master the Italian and French languages.

It happened, some eighteen months after his engagement there, that Signor Vanti fell ill, and rather than entrust the confidential work that fell to his share to a stranger, Mr Clayton, at Guy's request, although somewhat doubtingly, allowed him to reply to the letters.

All doubt, however, was at an end after the principal had read them through, for they not only displayed correctness of language, but an intimate knowledge of the business, which Mr Clayton, highly as he estimated the abilities of young Guy, was far from suspecting him to possess.

From that moment his position in the house was secured. Signor Vanti, on his partial recovery, was compelled to seek a warmer climate, and Guy Rivers was duly installed in his place, at a salary that enabled him to be of great assistance to his family.

The first effects of his altered circumstances were at once felt in the little cottage at Ventnor. Sophy was invited up to town to keep her brother's house; for the other two girls were now of an age to take her place in assisting their mother. Willy soon followed, as Guy obtained for him a berth in the counting-house of a merchant, and he managed to give him sleeping-room in his own dwelling. And many were the presents which found their way to the Isle of Wight, and that arrived, directed to Mr or Mrs Rivers, in the handwriting of Guy.

And all this good was done by his own exertions, aided by the abilities he had inherited from his parents, and backed by the friends whom he had himself made. These results also were obtained, not, as we have said on more than one occasion, through a prepossessing exterior, or that easy address which engages the sympathies of beholders, even before the individual is known. Guy possessed no such advantage. Every step he gained he was compelled to labour for, and in labour he found the firmest fortune and the truest happiness.

He still kept up an intimacy with Mrs Warkup, whose life, it is feared, was not quite so comfortable with her own son as she had found it with the son of her adoption.

She would make dismal complaints to Guy of the young man's irregular habits and extravagance. Still, they did not separate. They lived on together until her death, which occurred some few years afterwards, when it was found that the calls that young Warkup had made upon his mother's purse were so serious, that had she existed but a year or two longer, her means would have been entirely exhausted.

The worthy Tom continues to remain down in the country, and only occasionally comes up to town. He never does so, however, without calling upon Mr and *Miss Guy*, as he playfully calls Sophy. He has a very good situation, is married, and has two boys, who are the image of himself, which is

not saying much for their beauty ; but if, as they grow up, they resemble him in his honesty and kindness of heart, it does not much matter. His respect for Guy has never deserted him, "for," he will often say, "if it hadn't been for that young gentleman, who taught me to handle my pen, and I don't know what besides, I never should have been here."

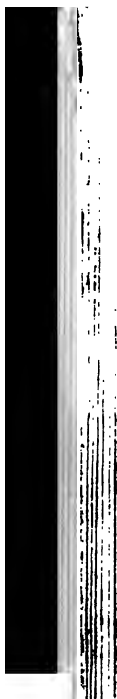
And with these last words in his praise, we will take our leave of Guy Rivers. We hope he will not be less a favourite with our young readers, because he never was "a pretty boy." In fact, they will not fail to discover, as they themselves pass through life, that "mere looks" have little power beyond a first introduction. When once a face and form have become familiar, they cease to excite attention, and the qualities of the mind and heart alone exercise an influence.

That the cast of Guy Rivers' features has been no impediment to his advancement, is undoubted ; for few men in this great city are in the enjoyment of a larger share of prosperity, or are blessed with a greater amount of respect and friendship from their fellow-citizens. And so true it is that the admiration excited by goodness of character imparts even a sense of personal beauty to the most ordinary face, that we have more than once heard some of Guy's acquaintance reply to the remarks of strangers about the plainness of his features, "Oh! do you think so? Well, do you know that sometimes, when he

is animated, we consider that he looks positively handsome!"

Little has Guy himself ever troubled about his personal appearance. His aim through life seems to have been to do his duty, and effect among his kindred and friends all the good which his position has enabled him to perform. Guided by such motives, he has secured a large number of sincere and attached friends, and obtained for himself as great a measure of happiness as mortals here below are capable of enjoying.

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